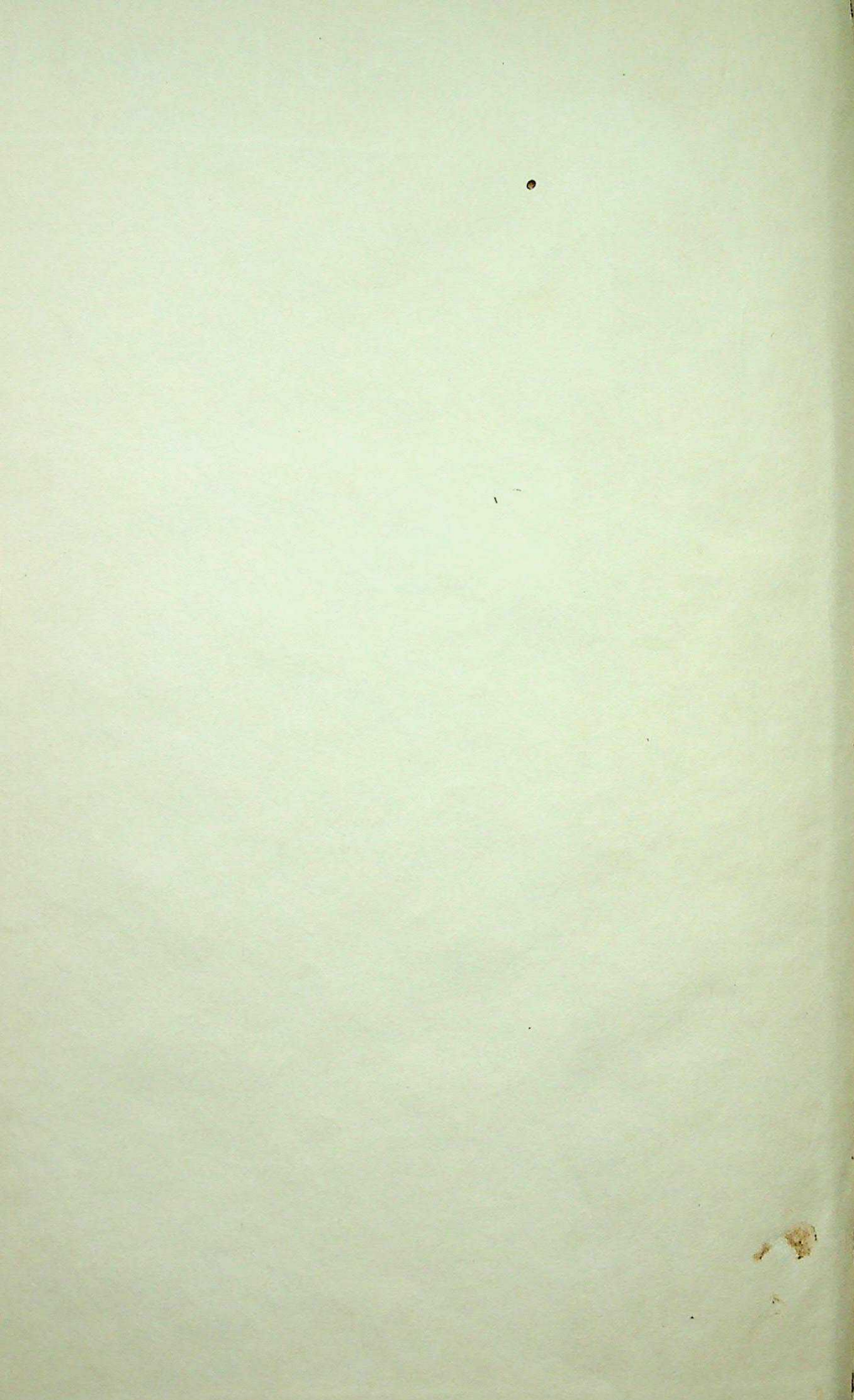


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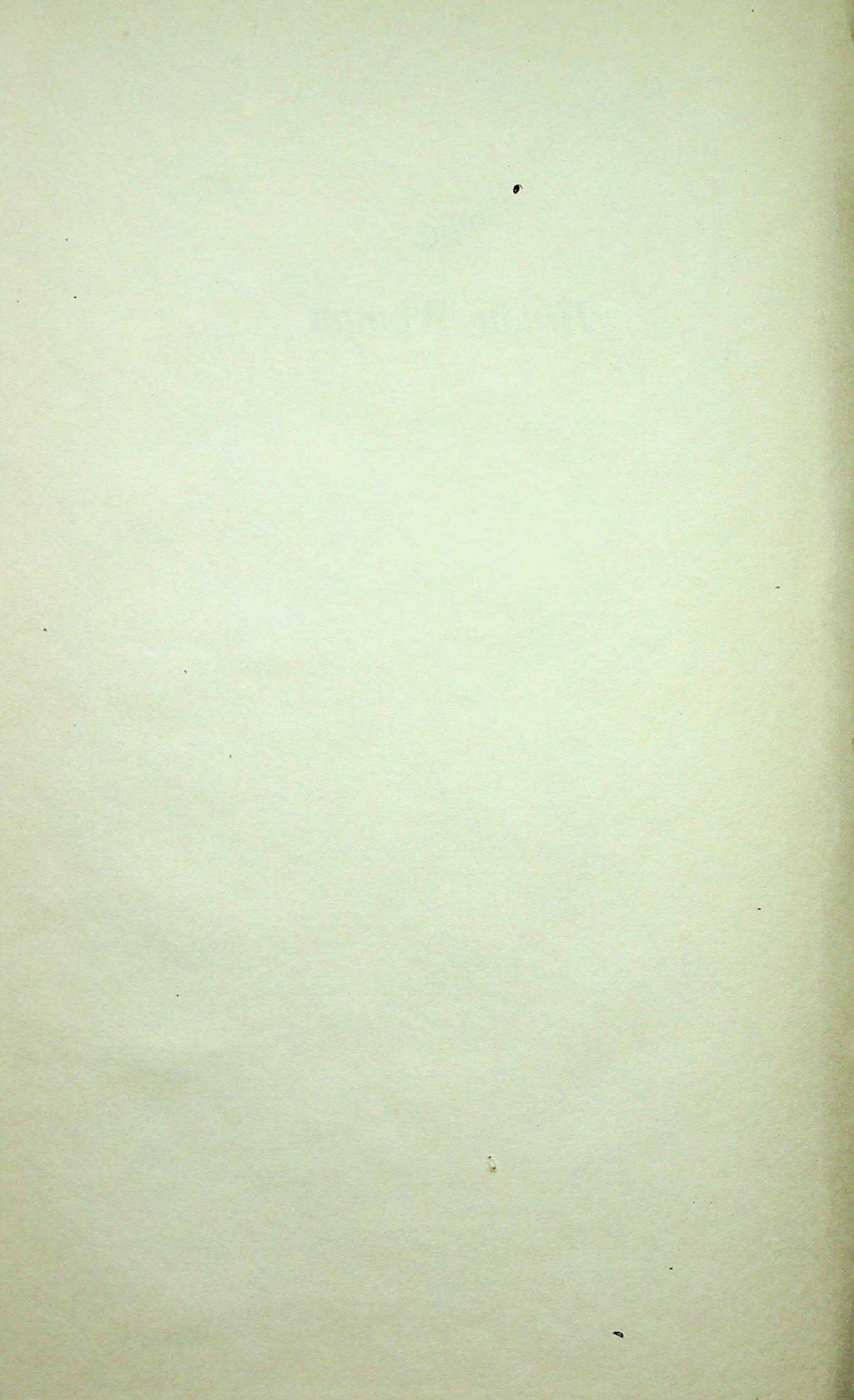
**MARGARET  
CORMACK**

**THE  
HINDU  
WOMAN**





*The*  
*Hindu Woman*



*The*  
*Hindu Woman*

*Margaret Cormack, Ph.D.*



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## Foreword

MANY OF US have long carried around in our heads a confused picture — dingy and colourful at the same time — of the women of India. This picture is a montage of scraps from various sources — the “Mother India” notion of the “downtrodden” women of India, helpless, exploited by men, worn to an early death ; and the exotic sensuous women of the Orient, who make maharajahs happy with their beauty and talent, are somehow in the picture too.

Like many another American visitor, when I reached India in the fall of 1950 I was astonished to find something different from this montage : women of dignity, charm, simple beauty in all classes — farm women in the villages, middle class women in the cities, government women in New Delhi — women who were neither helpless and downtrodden nor absorbed in erotic gratification of pampered husbands. Some of these intelligent and still graceful, feminine women were in legislatures, some were running schools or teaching in them, some were still in *purdah*. And *purdah* as I saw it in half a dozen villages across the United Provinces often denoted a gay, vigorous, alert group totally unlike any description of *purdah* I had ever heard.

Since I was there only a few months, I could only take pictures of what I saw and talk about the wisdom and spontaneity and grace of the women I met in so many different settings. But I felt that we needed desperately to know much more about the strong, warm women of India and to understand the many facets of their life, so much of which has been reported to us in distorted ways.

So when I met Miss Cormack and read her manuscript, I was

delighted to find that here was someone really equipped to write seriously and knowledgeably about the women of India, with sympathy and detachment and intelligence.

Born in India, Miss Cormack lived there for a total of twenty-one years. She saw in the South both the subjugation and the very real idealization of the feminine. She saw how nationalism seemed to give women a tremendous release of energy, which enabled them to go ahead to do many things for their communities. She saw how modern women in India are able to go into medicine, law, and politics without confronting the blocks which stop American and European women, and she saw the amazing pace of the growth of the modern woman's role in India.

Her book is written from experience broader, longer and deeper than that which lies back of many of the popular journalistic and missionary accounts of life in India, and also from an informed reading of Hindu literature, where she got clues to the origins of some of the trends important today.

I hope that this book will prove to be a beginning of further work in this field and that it will stimulate not just a new and more accurate understanding of the character of women in India, but a new perception of the potentialities of women in the world today, both West and East.

LOIS BARCLAY MURPHY

## Preface

IN MY MANY years spent in India, I was increasingly puzzled by a seeming contradiction. One saw daily an actual and often "inhuman" subjugation of women, especially in the lower classes. Yet, equally apparent, was a lofty ideal of femininity, symbolized in "Mother India", a Mother Cult, goddess worship, and in a general cultural veneration of the feminine. When women began to use their creative energies in the nationalist movement and then to take on important offices in Independent India, it was often said that Hindu women surely possessed some "secret" denied their Western sisters. How could it happen? What lay in the special male-female relationship in India?

I sought the explanations in a much deeper understanding of the modern Hindu woman than I had while living in India, and then traced the roots of existing patterns in Hindu history and religious scriptures. The study seemed all the more significant, as Hindu culture, relatively stable for many centuries, is now involved in very rapid social change. The emerging modern Hindu woman will not be "like a Western woman in a sari", however, for her psyche and her role rest upon different conditions and philosophies.

This study on *The Hindu Woman* is a portion of my Ph.D. dissertation, entitled *Traditional Patterns in the Interiorization of the Ideals of Womanhood by Hindu Girls*, presented in 1951 at Columbia University. It is its purpose to describe the Hindu feminine role and also how the *dharma* (function, duty) of a Hindu girl is interiorized — primarily through the training in

the home, in a carefully controlled structure of relationships, and in attitudes and duties still sanctioned by strongly maintained patterns of traditional femininity.

The major source of data for the study is descriptive material from ten Indian informants, women graduate students in Columbia University, coming from educated, urban, and middle and upper-class backgrounds, representing various geographical areas. Most of the women are Hindu, but the group includes a Moslem, a Sikh, and a Christian, for the purpose of demonstrating the pervasiveness of the Hindu culture.

I myself was born in India and have lived there twenty-one years, my experience being chiefly connected with the South, in villages, and with the lower classes, but augmented with extensive travel and some residence in the North. One invaluable experience was a year spent as lecturer in the Teachers' Training College for Indian Women in Madras.

Literary sources include translations of original Vedic, Brahminic, Puranic, and Epic literature, aboriginal myths, and philosophical and sociological commentaries.

There were extended interviews with the informants, based upon a prepared list of questions but not confined to it, the questions being chiefly open-ended and of a general nature, becoming more specific at the end of the interview. Legends and ceremonies mentioned by the informants were checked with literary sources.

Limitations of the study lie in the fact that the informants are representative of the more progressive, educated groups. It must not be inferred, however, that patterns here described are not typical in many respects of other groups. All the informants have village ancestral roots, and some have had primary village experience. The pattern of life in India is based upon the village, and urban life developed from this pattern. It is a safe generalization to say that village life tends to be more conservative—with more adherence to traditional patterns—but also that there is more overt aggression among the peasants. As will be seen, aggression is not normal in Hindu culture.

The psychology of Hindu women is a function of the overall social, religious, political and economic determinants of the Hindu culture, but this study does not undertake an analysis of these determinants or their modern trends. Frequent reference

is made, however, to some modern influences that are now modifying traditional patterns.

A further limitation of the study is that certain aspects of Indian art, music, and the dance, which are important carriers of the culture, have not been fully treated.

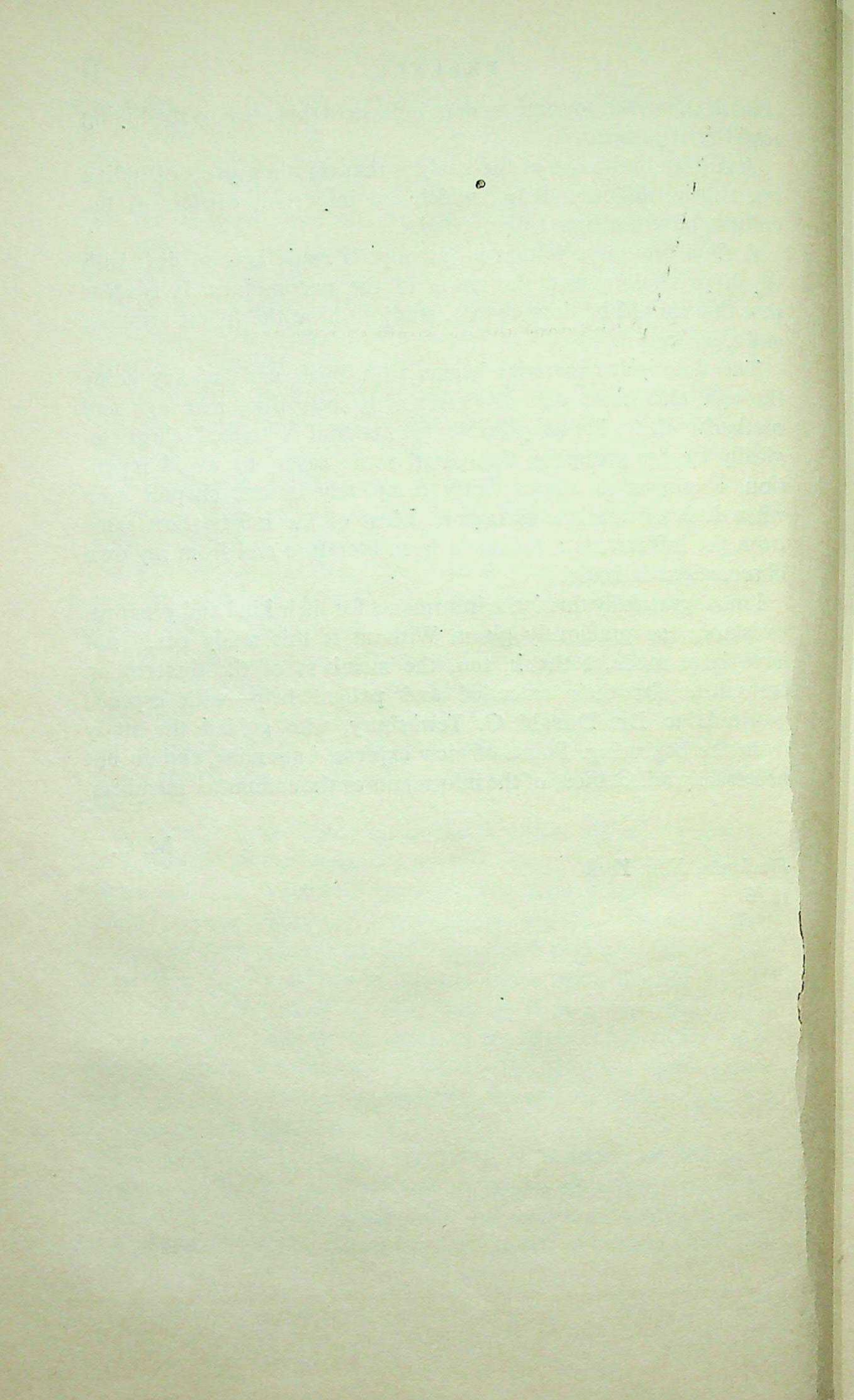
A final limitation is that no attempt is made here to deal with depth psychology and the realm of the unconscious. It is clear that this should be done for the study to have the fullest meaning and significance.

The descriptive material begins with birth and infancy going through childhood and adolescence to betrothal, marriage and motherhood. So far as possible the material is treated chronologically by age grouping, though in some cases, to avoid repetition, a subject is treated fairly completely in one chapter even when it is of continuous import. Most of the information came from the informants ; a little is from literature and from my own observations in India.

I most gratefully thank the informants for their kind and generous assistance, so graciously given. Without it this study could not have been made. I thank, too, the members of the dissertation committee for their extended and patient help—with especial gratitude to Dr. Donald G. Tewksbury, who guided the study from the beginning. Points of view expressed are mine, and do not necessarily reflect those of the informants or the committee members.

M. C.

*Fredonia, New York*  
1953



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## *Birth and Infancy*

AN INFANT BORN in any society immediately becomes a member of various groups, but primarily of a family group in a cultural matrix. In India, as in most cultures, an infant is closest to its mother, but more than in many cultures—especially the Western—it is nurtured in a family group comprising many members and is cared for by many of them. It is necessary, in order to understand the period of birth and infancy in Hindu India, to look at the kind of world into which the infant is born.

### **The Family**

The traditional pattern is the 'joint family', which has been in operation from early Vedic times to the present, the industrial and political development of modern times weakening but so far not destroying it.\*<sup>1</sup> It is based upon the patriarchal family system, with authority and inheritance passing through the male line. When a boy marries he brings his bride to his father's home, and the couple is a part of the joint family. A new husband is expected to work, as are all males, but all earnings are pooled and jointly used; hence there is little pressure on any individual—young, old, or disabled. The titular and actual head of the group is the oldest male, and although there are family 'discussions' the responsibility and ultimate authority rest with this person. Living in the house are his younger brothers and their families, his married sons

<sup>1</sup> The asterisk is used throughout the text to indicate general consensus among the informants on particular points

and their families, and his unmarried sons and daughters. His sisters and married daughters have become members of their husbands' families. On rare occasions, when they are widowed, they return to the parental home, though it is generally customary for them to remain in their husbands' homes. The dowries of the brides ordinarily become a part of the common property of the joint family.

The modern tendency, noticeable today in cities though not yet in villages, is for the various married couples to live independently, but there still remains a strong maintenance of the joint family pattern of authority and cohesion. The families usually do not live far apart, coming together for the family festivals, ceremonies, and joint decisions. Even those living in another city or village tend to go back to the parental home on many occasions, even though great expense may be involved.\*

The joint family is itself a part of the larger family clan, which also meets on special occasions and within which there may be no intermarriage. The clan, in turn, is a part of the subcaste, occupational groupings, based on heredity, of which there are several thousands; the subcaste is a part of one of the four main caste groups. Traditionally the castes are Brahmin (priests and teachers), Kshatriya (kings and warriors), Vaishya (merchants), the Sudra (manual workers), with the outcastes (scavengers) beneath the caste hierarchy. Marriage is supposed to take place within the large caste grouping, and, except for some modern, progressive families, still does.\*

A Hindu child lives within a world of the family, having a few more—but not many—primary contacts as it grows up. The modern school is one new outside contact. The Hindu temple is not much used by the educated and upper classes, but even when frequented—as by the lower and middle classes—it is not a social institution in the manner of a Western church.\* Boys have considerable freedom to play in the streets and fields, but girls, especially those from better homes, are usually strictly circumscribed, living more or less within the house and courtyard, playing with members of the family or with approved neighbours' children.\*

This, then, is the world of people into which the Hindu infant is born. It is necessary now to understand the social attitudes and rites attending pregnancy and the birth of a child, the mother's responsibility for the care of the child, the significance of being

a female child, and the normal care and training of an infant. The period treated is roughly the first three years of life.

### Social Attitudes and Rites

"In India it is honorable and lucky to be pregnant." <sup>Y 2</sup> This is the prevailing attitude of Indians of all classes and in all areas toward a pregnant woman.\* Her state is therefore one of fulfillment and joy. Not only is there no thought that she should hide her condition (save in extremely orthodox families, in some areas, during the last few weeks of pregnancy), but every expression of respect and honour is shown to a potential mother—even if she is a stranger or a foreigner. She is fulfilling her function, and her friends and relatives rejoice.\* She is becoming a mother, an honoured position because "no woman has status until she has a child",<sup>F</sup> and there is soon to be a child. The family thus lives on into the future, perpetuating itself and becoming a part of the ever-flowing river of infinity that is so integral a part of Hindu philosophy.

The mother herself should not speak much about the expected child or prepare too much for its arrival, for fear of calling it to the attention of the evil eye.<sup>A, C</sup> (This may be chiefly in fear of Shastha Devi, a traditional malevolent female deity whom mothers and their friends propitiate.) This restraint, undoubtedly rooted in superstitious or religious belief, serves the purpose, also, of preventing too great disappointment to the mother if the child dies, and caution is practised for some years after the child is born. (Infant and child mortality rates in India are still very high.) "A woman shouldn't praise her children, especially to other people. Even I don't do it today. We blacken our children's eyes, try to make them less attractive than they really are."<sup>B</sup> "It is the duty of all, but especially of the mother, to protect the child from evil."<sup>Z</sup>

There is little doubt that great emphasis is put on the hope of a male child, especially if it is the first child or if there are only girls in the family.\* This has always been true in India, *pumsavana* (male-production) being the third of the sacred 'domestic ceremonies'. A son has been considered socially and religiously necessary, to support the parents in their old age and to ensure salvation for the father through the funeral rites. This attitude, though it

<sup>2</sup> The ten Indian women graduate students at Columbia who served as informants are referred to as A, B, C, D, E, F, G, X, Y, Z throughout the study

is being deliberately changed by many modern families who consciously treat girls in the same way as boys, is still the prevailing one, growing out of the traditions of property, family authority, and religious duty.\* *B*, though the most Westernized of the women interviewed, was taken up on the roof in the moonlight by her orthodox Hindu mother-in-law to drink coconut milk and to undergo rites there, to ensure a male child and one with a fair skin<sup>B</sup>. *G*, a member of a progressive family, said her father had arranged with the Brahmin priest to have a boy, but there "had been a mistake. A girl was born." *D* reported that some older women were supposed to be expert in determining sex, "but were often wrong". Apparently, too, for those families accustomed to going to the temple, it is a common practice for the mother and relatives to go to the temple and promise money and sweets if a boy is born. This kind of promise, called *manat* (promise to duty), is used on all kinds of occasions in orthodox homes, even for the passing of exams. If the child is born as promised, the deity is given gifts.<sup>A</sup> In refuting the weight of the religious necessity for a man to have a son,<sup>D</sup> insisted that the desire for a son is chiefly a woman's desire, not a man's. "Women become happy when they have a son."<sup>D</sup>

"The first question at birth is, 'Is it a boy or a girl?' A girl is a great burden, not only economically, but she must be delivered virgin to her husband."<sup>B</sup> *C* wrote in a paper:

Especially in the case of a girl, her marriage is a serious headache to her father, with the result that the birth of a daughter is not desired. Hindu classics abound in descriptions of the state of mind of the father, who is worried about the marriage of the girl. (In the classic Sanskrit drama *Uttar Rama Charita* the heroine describes the state of mind of her father, who is worrying on account of her marriage as if he is to become a pauper after the loss of all his property.) In fact, it would not be too far from the truth to say that the birth of a daughter in the family is considered to be a curse.

This attitude is still very strong.\* It links boys with the ancestral home, with an increase of wealth to it through the dowries of their brides as well as through their earning power, and with the ensured perpetuity of the home through their children. This is in contrast to linking girls with the taking away of something valuable from the home — the taking away of the girl herself, money for the expensive marriage ceremony, and property in the form of

dowry. "Because of the laws of inheritance, girls leave the home and become a part of another home. They will have nothing to do with the continuation of this family. A girl is always taught that she will have to create the new family." <sup>Z</sup>

*D* told of a special celebration in the family for the conception of the first child, and *Z* insisted there is a celebration at the conception of each child, when the woman goes to her own home to feast there and to receive gifts from her relatives. (This is undoubtedly *garahadana*, the first of the twelve sacred domestic ceremonies in Hindu tradition.) Then, during her pregnancy there is an indulgence of the mother's food cravings, and the special tidbits she desires are generally given her. <sup>A,D,Z</sup> "There is undoubtedly a physiological basis for most of the things she wants—such as extra milk and ghee—but there is also a psychological basis for other wants, as for spices in the case of a friend of mine. But all the desires are indulged." <sup>A</sup> This need is usually formalized with a special feast, called the *shaadh*—"for the sake of getting together." <sup>A,D,Z</sup> To this feast come women friends and relatives, bringing gifts. In orthodox homes the gifts are not for the baby, but just for the mother, because of the general stigma attached to a mother's making clothes for the baby or planning too much for it. <sup>A</sup> *A* recalled one friend who had three *shaadhs* in the fourth, the seventh, and the ninth months. She commented that this was unusual, there being as a rule just one food ceremony for the expectant mother, in the seventh month. At that time, as on all festive occasions, there is a feast for all, and food, clothes, jewellery, and sometimes baby clothes, are given the mother. "It is one of the ways of meeting the needs of the family." <sup>Z</sup>

Usually the birth of a child takes place in the home. <sup>\*</sup> "Only poor people go to hospitals." <sup>B</sup> "Birth is natural. It is part of life, all of which is natural, so we like to have it in the home." <sup>F</sup> Among the more educated there is proper medical attention, usually with a trained nurse-midwife, occasionally with a doctor. Among the less educated and less wealthy, the midwife is not necessarily formally trained, and is normally a member of a low caste group or is a Moslem, since the process of birth is considered 'unclean'. <sup>\*</sup> (It is significant to note that the profession of nursing is, in itself, in violation of caste rules and is therefore distasteful to the upper caste groups. <sup>C,F</sup>)

Most of the informants did not know of any specific birth rites,

though traditional Hinduism includes one, *jata-karman*, in the sacred domestic ceremonies. *A* spoke of the blowing of conch shells for boys, occasionally even for girls, a rite originally intended to drive away evil spirits. There is often a feast in honour of the first child, usually also for the first boy, "but this is because Indians like to have feasts on all occasions".<sup>D</sup> There usually is no ceremony, then, but the birth is very particularly a cause for rejoicing.\*

The mother is considered unclean as a result of childbirth, and her husband, relatives, and friends are not allowed to come and see her.\* "On the sixth day she is washed, on the tenth day she has a purifying bath and is allowed to 'come out'".<sup>D</sup> In the stricter families she is not considered 'clean' until the fortieth day, after which she lives with her husband again, may have visitors, and may enter the kitchen.<sup>B,C,D</sup> (An Indian obstetrician explained the functional reasons—forty days is about six weeks, the time it takes for the uterus to contract.) "I was very hurt. My mother-in-law didn't come to see me for forty days after my son was born, and yet I knew she was very anxious about her grandchild. When she came she went straight to the baby's crib and pressed gold, rice, coconut, and flowers into the baby's hand." <sup>B</sup>

The naming of the child (*nama-karana* in the sacred domestic ceremonies) is an important occasion, attended by all the relatives,\* unless the family cannot afford the ceremony.<sup>A</sup> This may be done at any time in the first year, but the twelfth day, shortly after the mother has 'come out' (if she does so on the tenth day) is a common time.<sup>C,D</sup> "If it is a family that frequently has the *hawan* ceremony there will be one at this time, with the priest present."<sup>D</sup> (*Hawan* means sacrificial fire. "Several things are mixed with ghee and put in the fire to purify the air and as offerings to the gods and elements. It is used for many ceremonies."<sup>D</sup>) The horoscope is generally used, though not necessarily literally followed.\* *A* insisted there is more emphasis put on the sound of a name than on its meaning. *F*, from Bombay, described a fast-disappearing custom, according to which the father's sister has the privilege of naming the child and is the special guest of honour (*F* did not know why). "The child is put in her lap, and she says a few verses and names the child. If there are no father's sisters, the child is named by the parents."<sup>F</sup> *A*, from Bengal, said it is usually not the parents who choose the name but the older members of the family, "who take a great interest in the continuance of

the family".<sup>4</sup> C said it was often the mother-in-law who did the naming. At this ceremony, as at all family ceremonies, there is feasting and "much giving of presents".\*

Later, in the first year of the infant's life, sometimes at six months, sometimes at ten months, the *anna prasana* (the first food ceremony) is celebrated.<sup>4, D</sup> (It is another of the sacred domestic ceremonies.) "This is occasionally given earlier for girls than for boys, since girls grow up more rapidly." <sup>D</sup> Again it is a family festival occasion. As described by A, "the child officially takes rice for the first time. He is given a big *thala* (platter) with rice and all kinds of prepared foods on it in little bowls. He can choose what he wants, without direction, and generally gets in a terrible mess, but the relatives all enjoy the occasion." Sometimes, on the same occasion, "the child is dressed in a dhoti and seated on a stool. In front of him are a pen or quill, a rupee, earth, and other things, and the child's choice signifies what he might become, although they don't pay any attention later to his choice." <sup>A</sup>

<sup>D</sup> described a ceremony, not mentioned by any of the other informants, the "taking away of the birth hair," usually with the priest in attendance, usually a *hawan* ceremony (*Chanda* in the sacred domestic ceremonies). <sup>D</sup> said, "Most communities say, 'Don't take it away for girls,' but mine does it for girls as well as boys". The hair is shaved off with great ceremony, and there is feasting and giving of gifts. The mother's and father's sisters make clothes and buy presents for the child, receiving from the parents, in return, clothes to wear to the ceremony. Sweets are distributed. This ceremony can be celebrated in the first, third, fifth, or seventh year, but the third year is the most common.

Abbé Dubois, who lived in South India in the early 19th century, has elaborate and detailed accounts of the rites of *jata-karman* (purification of the mother ten days after the birth of her child), *nama-karana* (naming of the child), *anna prasana* (first food ceremony), and *chaula* (the tonsure at three years).<sup>3</sup> His descriptions give an elaborateness of detail not mentioned by the informants, each rite involving many rules about food, water, purification, etc. These and other life-ceremonies are mentioned also by Farquhar.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 155-58

<sup>4</sup> J. N. Farquhar, *A Primer of Hindustan* (London, Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 178

### Responsibility for the Care of the Child

The mother has the chief responsibility for the care of the child, with the help of other women, daughters, or ayah, in the household, if there are any.\* *D* made the point that the mother-in-law, if she is living in the home, plays with the child a little but rarely does much else for it, as she is busy taking care of the household.<sup>b</sup> All informants agreed that even though mothers are primarily responsible, babies are loved and tended by all the women in the household.\* "It gives a child a great feeling of security to have so many mothers."<sup>c</sup> (It is interesting that several commented on 'neglect' shown to American babies. "They are often left alone, in play-pens, or in backyards.")

Fathers sometimes help to care for infants, too, though this is the mother's domain.\* "It depends on the family," *G* said, adding with a laugh, "Sometimes nowadays the father helps so much that the mother gets annoyed." This fact clearly fits the general idea of separate functions, the women rather jealously guarding their own role—traditionally that of guardians of the hearth and mother of the children. *D* said that few men pay any attention to small babies, but some do after the child is six months old, and a few actually take most of the care into their own hands. She insisted that "nowadays girls draw more attention from their fathers than boys" and that "girls are more intelligent in childhood" (a statement she couldn't justify). *A* expressed the more common view that fathers rarely get near the infants. "Once in a while they may pick at their cheeks. Men in the villages pay more attention (the writer's observation, too), but middle-class men in the cities leave these things to their wives. They do not know what to do with babies and they are afraid of getting wet." *C* gave strong views on this subject, having given a good deal of thought to it in connection with family life classes. "In our culture when a father nurses his baby people will call him something which does not befit a man. So naturally the father in our family avoids these things. The father wants the child in the family, but he is not willing to share the responsibility of its training and nursing. Mother and father both welcome the child, but their attitudes are different. I think the father ought not to feel awkward in nursing the baby, and fortunately some modern fathers are becoming more conscious of their roles in the development of the child."

## Significance of Being a Female Child

There was general consensus that in spite of the fact that boys are wanted more than girls, once a child arrives it is loved for its own sake, and that at least in infancy there is no preferential treatment.\* (This is more than a family feeling. Children are very much loved by all in India. This attitude is carried over to strange children, even to white children. It has been the experience of the writer, when travelling with an infant, that it is difficult to prevent all the women in the railway compartment from pinching the cheek—the equivalent of a kiss—of the baby. Similarly, when living within an Indian community, it is difficult to take children for a walk without having them experience the same affectionate caress many times.) “Children are so much of a pleasure. They are all loved equally. A child is like the child Krishna. Even lullabies show that. ‘A child is given by God, and since it is here, it will stay awhile.’”<sup>F</sup> “We say that anybody born is a ‘prayer call’.”<sup>Y</sup> C well expressed what others hinted, saying that there is no difference at all in the love and care shown babies of either sex, but that with boys there is often an added factor of ‘worship’. She felt sure that in many cases girls grew up sensitive to this distinction, and thus to their less wanted position, especially in those families where the financial burden of marrying off the daughters is very heavy. “Conservative families, like my father’s family, always give preferred treatment to boys, but this is not true with the progressive families.”<sup>C</sup> It is significant that there was conscious emphasis of this impartiality today, no doubt because among the families of the women interviewed there is a high degree of conscious equality of sexes. Z, a Sikh, proudly emphasized a reform of the traditional Hindu attitude, saying, “With the Sikhs there is *no* distinction between boys and girls”. The other informants agreed that as children grow older the boys are generally favoured.\*

The above general statements apparently may be modified when there are no boys in the family. Girls are then given great affection, and in such families it is more likely that there will be a very close bond between father and daughter than when there is a son in the family, too.<sup>F, G</sup> “We were treated as well as boys because there were no boys in the family. My parents considered boys and girls equal, though in most families boys are favoured until they are grown. Fathers, more than mothers, usually favour sons, but

in our case, as there were no sons, father was crazy about us. When a girl gets married the mother likes her better. The girl has been a helper and a companion, and the mother doesn't want to lose her."<sup>F</sup> Several others touched this theme, that although mothers prefer to have sons born to them, girls become very close to them as they grow up—"because they're in the same boat".<sup>G</sup> It can be inferred, however, that this special closeness by association is not felt by girls when they are infants, for mothers in general prefer sons because of the heightened social significance of sons.

It can be seen from the above that there is some contradiction in information, and there may be a difference between the conscious and the unconscious treatment of infants. It seems that, in fact, preferential treatment is usually given to male children, though the informants insisted this does not carry over to the care and handling of infants. They insisted, without exception, for instance, that boys are not shown off to visitors and friends with any more pride and love than girls. Only *A* conceded that this might be the case with distant relatives, who see the child more as a member of the group than as an individual. *B* mentioned that she knew of ayahs kissing the penises of baby boys, and the writer has noticed the pride of ayahs in little boys urinating with male vigour. This seems to be a natural attitude, as the ayahs would be conditioned more by the social standing of males than by the appreciation of the child as an intimate member of the family.

It seems relevant to quote a paragraph from *Purdah, the Status of Indian Women*, written by Mrs. Frieda M. Das, a Swiss woman with some American higher education, married to a Hindu. Mrs. Das is, to be sure, pleading against the evils of the subjection of women, but she is by no means writing a polemic against Hinduism or Hindu women. In fact, she has had intimate experience with Hindu life and expresses understanding of it. Her point of view is important here because of her sensitiveness to the psychological aspects of being a woman.

Least important and least worthy of consideration in the complex joint family life is the newborn female infant. Not that she is generally treated harshly; Hindus are naturally kind and gentle, and she is sure to get some share of affection from various sources. But she is too unremunerative a prospect to be able to command a welcome. She will be an unmitigated expense from beginning to end, will never contribute to the home by work of her own, will leave it for good between twelve and fifteen years of age. Worst

of all, when she does go, she will take with her in the shape of dowry a good slice out of the family fortune. The knowledge of all this is bound to affect the attitude of various members of the vast family in different ways; should she with several other sisters be born of a sonless woman, they all will bear the brunt of vented spite and scorn. The mother, however, knowing how soon she will lose her daughter for good, often lavishes upon her an immoderate amount of indulgence. Yet even so, from her very first years the sensitive girl cannot fail to be painfully aware how much less welcome and cherished she is than her fortunate brother, how very little she counts. Training she receives practically none; about the only definite information imparted to her is that she is destined to be a wife — (lucky if she is fair-skinned and beautiful, so that someone may take her without asking for too great a dowry) — and that she must be a Sita to him, he her deity, her prime duty in life being to please him and not annoy his mother.<sup>5</sup>

F and Z made a point similar to one in the above statement. They said that girls actually receive some preferential treatment and extra attention, as they are going to leave the family. "Girls have special privileges in the house. They should have all their wishes in the home, because they won't get them later. Boys are denied some things because they can go out of the home and have their freedom."<sup>F</sup> What the total effect of this compensatory attentions is, when it occurs, one can only surmise. It seems reasonable to assume that it may emphasize the less desirable position of girls — though with love and affection. Whatever the more subtle aspects, it is clear that all children are loved for their own sakes and become intimate members of a close-knit family group.

### The Normal Care and Training of Infants

Indian babies have a great deal of close contact with their mothers' bodies, and are in general carried close to the body, facing their mothers.<sup>G,X,Y</sup> When they are a few months old they are often carried astride the mother's hip with the mother's arm around them. The absence of baby-carriages means that babies are carried thus, usually by the mother, but often by other members of the family group. The additional fact that they are normally breast-fed means that mothers take them wherever they go. Women who work in the fields, for instance, take their babies with them, often

<sup>5</sup> Frieda M. Das, *Purdah, the Status of Indian Women* (New York, Vanguard Press, Inc., 1932), p. 170

putting them in a sling made of an old sari tied to a tree, where they are watched by older children as the mothers work in the field. Even bathing is done with human contact, the mother usually holding the infant in her lap as she sits cross-legged on the ground.

Almost universally, Indian babies are breast-fed, 'on demand'.\* (And, significantly, Indian mothers almost always have copious amounts of milk, even when malnourished themselves). Village women who attend any kind of public function feed their babies without sense of shame. It is an act that arouses no comment, and it quiets the babies who would otherwise disturb the meeting. "Only some of the more educated mothers are trying to feed their babies by schedule."<sup>B,C</sup> Pacifiers are widely used, and are not considered wrong.\* Thumb-sucking is very rare,\* and even when it occurs, it is not considered bad and is not corrected.<sup>C</sup> "I have seen busy mothers put their babies' thumbs in their mouths, so that they will be content until the mothers can feed them."<sup>F</sup>

Weaning is a natural process and is rarely forced.\* "Children usually drink their mothers' milk up to one and a half years, and some up to three and four."<sup>C</sup> "The babies just begin to eat solid food and usually wean themselves. Teething is an important factor, and when there are a few teeth the baby usually stops drinking mother's milk. It is not a forced process."<sup>F</sup> Mothers don't usually apply anything to their breasts to prevent the babies' drinking. *C* was the only one to report that some mothers do use red pepper or some bitter stuff.

"Toilet training is fairly natural. There is training, but it is not stressed, and mothers never take the attitude that the child is naughty when he has an accident. They aren't upset even at dinner parties when the children make a mess on the floor."<sup>C</sup> All agreed that "except in some educated families" urination and defecation are not 'bad,' and children are never scolded for them.\* (This is undoubtedly partially a function of the lesser emphasis in India on the value of material possessions.) "When they get dirty there is no scolding in the sense that the child is bad, but he is made to feel that he has been inconsiderate of others."<sup>X</sup> *X* said, too, that there was no thought of naughtiness, but explained, "The accent is on cleanliness. Even the poor are cleaner than the poor here (in America). Cleanliness is cultural." *A* spoke in similar vein: "Toilet training is not forced, but of course there has to be training. In more orthodox homes you learn to take

off *all* you wear when you go to the latrine, as it is not a clean place. Hands must be washed, at least. But children who get dirty are not considered naughty. They are not scolded, because they just don't know yet." \*

A Hindu baby is ordinarily not left alone. "There are so many grown-ups, so many older sisters, that the child never gets into danger. He is watched, and dangerous things are kept away from him." <sup>x</sup> *A* also emphasized this care: "They are always saying, 'Don't go there'. It is always on the negative side. Children are restricted too much, and become frightened even of dogs." (Police-men, dogs, and jackals are among the *ayahs'* chief fear objects.) *C* and *Y* made the point that educated families are trying to let children learn through small mishaps and greater freedom. But they and *F* agreed that the general pattern is to prevent the child from encountering any danger.

Never being left alone, little children may not need attention-getting devices like temper-tantrums and whining. Certainly there are fewer in India than in the United States, though they do exist, "especially with the more pampered children". <sup>4</sup> "Yes, children sometimes have temper-tantrums, and sometimes they are allowed to howl, sometimes they are not. Whining is common only with the first child, but most mothers can't stand it. We dared not do it, as my mother so disliked it. Indian children usually get the attention they need from the mother or from other members of the family. A child is never allowed to feel he is not wanted or not liked." <sup>y</sup> "It is an adult's world, and tantrums are invariably sternly dealt with. A child's individual ego, when displayed, is crushed. (This is consistent with the general Hindu emphasis on self-control and on effacement of the individual.) The granny will take the child's part, but the mother will not. As to whining, I don't know whether there is any or not." <sup>x</sup> "Why should a child whine? We never let a child cry or be unhappy in India." <sup>F</sup>

"Babies are rocked a lot, sometimes to put them to sleep, sometimes just for enjoyment. And there are usually swings in every room. Mothers just love to swing with their babies." <sup>F</sup> "Babies are always picked up when they cry, and if they should go to sleep, they are patted." <sup>A</sup> "They usually are patted to sleep, but sometimes mothers are so busy they have to let them cry themselves to sleep. Mothers don't like to let babies cry, but they don't think it will hurt them to do so. Everything a child does is natural.

Everything in life is natural—but we don't leave it in its natural state."C

Punishment is a concept the informants were almost unwilling to consider in connection with infants, so repugnant was the idea. "A baby is punished only if the mother is in a bad temper, and this is seldom. Babies are a 'gift to the family'—even if the ninth or tenth child."A "Punishing is occasionally done, especially in the uneducated families. Beating a child is done because one has to take anger out on someone. But Indians rarely punish little children."Y (It is undeniable that there is much more overt aggression among the village people.) "Punished? No, children are only loved."X "There are some slaps, of course, but babies are very kindly treated."F "It is very interesting," A commented, "that American children are sometimes scolded for being clumsy and for falling down. That doesn't happen in India. If a child falls down the mother strikes the floor, to show it is not the fault of the child." C mentioned the same attitude: "It is the floor's fault".

Babies and little children are sometimes teased, "but only in a playful way".A Several informants described the practice of a mother's taking another baby and pretending it is her own, thus teasing her own child. "This is used as a social punishment."C "I have seen it done in my village," Y said. The motive, however, may not be the 'obvious' one, as is seen in X's account: "When other women come with children to the house, mothers many times tease their own children, taking another child and pretending it is their own. Their own children are hostile, but a mother will say, 'This is my baby,' so as to have the compensation of petting her own child for the rest of the evening. This is good for the child's ego."

Certainly one definite way in which little girls learn they are different from boys is in wearing little girls' clothes. Small babies, boys and girls, are dressed alike with some kind of shirt or smock and diaper.\* (Among the poorer classes, especially in the villages, babies and small children are naked from the waist down, or *in toto*.) But as the baby begins to walk, it is given boys' or girls' clothes,\* and it may be presumed that this is a part of the child's first consciousness of its sex. "They know they are little girls, all right, only sometimes they like to dress in little boys' clothes for fun. But they very much like little girls' frocks."C For festive occasions mothers use jewellery and cosmetics on their little girls,

even when they are just infants. All babies have bangles, and many little girls have their ears pierced for earrings when they are only a few days old, or at least before they are a year old.\*

We leave the period of infancy, then, having seen it as a period of warmth, love, and affection, with a minimum of shock or strain to the child. The Hindu infant apparently has the requisites for a definite sense of belonging to its world, and for a happy relationship with other human beings, his 'group membership' early becoming more important than his individuality. Recent psychological and psychoanalytical findings have shown the primary importance of these infant experiences, especially with relation to later ability to socialize. The oral experiences condition his 'basic sense of trust and of evil', thus to a certain extent influencing the individual in his relationship to his world. The Hindu baby, as we have seen, has every opportunity to satisfy his oral desires, and with late and usually child-conditioned weaning there is no early forcing of autonomy. He early establishes his faith in other people.

Further, as we have seen, the anal period is also generally child-conditioned in Hindu India, with no forced training and no sense of shame or guilt attached to elimination. This period, too, according to modern psychological theory, has basic influence on the socialization of the human being. The Hindu infant learns body habits naturally (chiefly through imitation), with no mandate to use his own will in elimination or retention. His human world neither demands nor condemns, hence his ego develops with a sense of harmony with others (and, again, with little individual autonomy). Most important, in the Hindu family pattern there is little or no hostility or aggression between the child and the parents — this at a time when social attitudes learned from parents are likely to become the permanent social attitudes. This being true, plus the fact that the infant is normally surrounded, handled, and loved by many others in a large household, it is logical to expect a resultant high degree of psychological security. As will be seen later, this, indeed, seems to be the fact.

## 2

# *Childhood*

THIS CHAPTER WILL describe the family relationships, household living arrangements, travel arrangements, and clothes, cosmetics, and jewellery. The period is roughly from the age of three to eleven or twelve, but there is some extension of description into later periods in order to preserve some organization of topics and to prevent too great repetition.

### **Family Relationships**

“In our country the father is still not a family friend, but a dictator. I think that this position of father in India is not due to any lack of feelings or to indifference, but it is the father who earns, and all the family is entirely dependent upon him economically.”<sup>c</sup> (The norm has been, for most Hindu groups, patriarchal from pre-Vedic days. Inheritance has been through the males, and authority has been vested in them. The women, economically dependent, are entitled to protection and respect.)

Culturally we expect the father to be a sort of authority, and every member of the family must try to keep him happy. The family is ready to accept this type of dictatorship . . . . We still feel that we are not able to speak frankly or discuss all our desires with our father. Whenever children want to ask something they speak with their mothers. This is because of fear of the dictatorship, and not fear of the father as a person. The father is the head of the family. Sometimes he is used as a policeman over all the activities of the children, and I think that is the reason for the relationship I have observed in many families. The children are never free in activities

and speech in the company of their fathers. But though the child is always in its mother's company it still likes to follow the father's mannerisms . . . . The father thinks that to look after the child's training is not his field and so he should not waste his time with the child. Many fathers do not even know what their children are learning in school . . . . This is the father's greatest fault, that he gives no attention to home, wife, or children. It may be that they are just too tired. They work very hard — usually twelve hours a day.<sup>c</sup>

The above statement by *C*, written in a paper on Indian family life, in general confirms information given by others about the father's position of authority, though there are differing accounts of him as a 'dictator'. Most of the informants enjoyed very happy relationships with their fathers. It is significant that *C* was admittedly much closer to her mother than to her father, having, in fact, less respect for her father than for her mother. But she has had, also, wide experience in a child guidance clinic, with the opportunity to observe many family patterns.

*Z* put emphasis, too, on the father as the bread-winner. "Women don't work, but men must — and therefore must have great consideration. They must not be disturbed when they are home. Women have no economic independence and have to put up with this. Men are very tired when they are through work. They really have little time for the family. On holidays they do what they can." (*Z* went on to remark that even the Indian men here in the West were so used to being waited on that they were often unconsciously impolite. "It is very embarrassing.")

*Z*, a social worker, insisted that little girls get much attention from their fathers. "Little girls get plenty of petting. More than the boys. If a girl and a boy, about the same age, run to their father, the father will take the girl. I have seen it in his expression that he feels he is going to lose his daughter. She is going to leave. Girls are more delicate, like flowers; they can't take so much; they are modest, sensitive, fine. A father becomes very attached to a girl. But as children grow up, girls cling to their mothers, boys to their fathers — because they go out with them."<sup>2</sup>

*D* (married, childless, thirty-nine years old, emotionally much attached to her father), reported that children sometimes prefer the mother, sometimes the father. "But girls will seldom do anything their fathers dislike. Girls have most of their freedom through their fathers. Boys resent the father's authority very

much ; girls resent the mother's authority very much." As a girl, *D* won a prize for a paper entitled "Do You Like Your Father or Mother More?" She wrote about her father, saying that in the ensuing discussion most of the girls said they liked their fathers more. It is perhaps relevant to note that *D* is a vegetarian, as her mother and sisters are, despite being in a 'meat-eating caste'. Her father, a doctor, took up a vegetarian diet on medical grounds, having cured infections thus and having been convinced he felt better on this diet. He urged his family, however, to continue with their meat diet. The three women refused, becoming vegetarians out of respect to him. *D*'s father is now dead and she is married to a meat-eating army officer, but she remains a vegetarian out of respect for her father, though it means the maintenance of two kitchens.

*G*, who has no brothers, is also much attached to her father, saying that families are different concerning discipline. Her mother was the stricter, and when her mother scolded her she ran to her father's store. "He never scolded or punished me. He just loved me." She referred to her mother as a disciplinarian, but a "kind person". "We were very warm, really, toward both parents. We knew that mother was doing everything for our own good."

All agreed that a girl sees more of her mother than any other member of the family, though older sisters play an increasingly important part as girls grow older. *F*, also strongly attached to her father (there were no boys in the family and the mother was ill), said, "There is real identification with the mother in most families, though this was not so with us". *C*, the psychologist, said, "In the small modern family the children are too dependent on the mother now. They used to be with many women, but now the mother spends too much time with the child ; she is too much the attraction." She also mentioned the relationship of child care to marital happiness. "Parents have not time to create respect for themselves if they are always busy with their own differences. Their influence on children is bad." <sup>c</sup>

*Y*, extremely fond of her mother (her father died when she was very young), unwilling in any way to live contrary to her mother's ideals (for instance, to dance in 'public,' though she is a good dancer), expressed great respect for an older sister. "My elder sister is my ideal." Similarly, *G* spoke repeatedly of her older sister, who took most of the care of her, "My elder sister and I

love each other dearly. I love her more than my mother. It was my sister who told me everything and read me everything, as I could not read my own language (the family was in the Philippines for a few years when she was young). Every night she told me everything she did, and read me many novels and all the stories from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*." *D*, also, was cared for chiefly by her older sister. "I was more attached to her than to my mother." She went on to justify this statement, adding, "Generally a child is cared for by many women. It is not bad not to like the mother best." Older sisters, we see, are an important part of a girl's life. Further, it is the expectation that each girl, as she grows older, will take responsibility in the care of the younger children.\*

The close brother-sister relationship is very striking in India — in legend and in life. This subject will be treated at greater length in a later chapter, but it is important to see the beginnings of this relationship in early childhood. Brothers and sisters play together with the utmost freedom, with the only status-free relationship they will know, if the age difference is not great. If the boy is older, the pattern of authority is not conflicting ("there is no ego fight" <sup>B</sup>) and is relatively weak. And, to a certain extent, if the girl is older there may be some equalizing effect. The girl is due the respect of age, the boy is due the respect of maleness — though in any struggle for supremacy, maleness wins out. <sup>D</sup> Brothers and sisters share everything, even joys and sorrows.\* But there is never any physical contact. <sup>A, D, P</sup> (The informants, impressed by the normality of physical contact in the United States, rather emphasized this fact, though they admitted it was not a subject of explicit prohibition in India.) They do not touch each other, sleep in the same bed, or undress in front of each other, except in very early childhood. <sup>X</sup> "It is a very close relationship but not a demonstrative one. It is protective." <sup>B</sup> Most families are strict about girls' going out on the streets, and one function of a brother is to accompany his sister.\* Every informant emphasized the aspect of 'friendship and companionship'. Brothers and sisters do not need to explain things to each other, because they understand each other. Even when a girl is in trouble she knows her brother understands her.\*

*B* pointed out a special privilege in being the youngest girl in the family. "The youngest girl is allowed great familiarity. She is often the go-between, the breaker of bad news, as anger will be averted

from her. Even a younger daughter-in-law is favoured, as there is much more latitude allowed to the younger than to the older."

The older members of the household, especially the women — the grandmothers and the aunts — are held in special affection by the children and have a special function. "Women, more than the men, carry on the cultural traditions. The family is everything, the individual is nothing."<sup>B</sup> "In India we look hopefully to the old members for the religious training of our children."<sup>C</sup> This religious training is partly in the form of religious worship, which we will discuss later, and partly in the form of the transmission of the legends and stories, so intimate a part of the Hindu tradition and so beloved by the children. The basis for the children's affection for the older women lies not only in the endless supply of stories but also in the family relationship, which involves kindness, sweets, gifts, and loving indulgence. "The elderly women are always most popular with children. They carry the Indian tradition. That is because in India the 'interest is dearer to us than the capital investment'. The grandchildren are more important than children, as they are the ideal of family continuity. A woman becomes much dearer to her mother and mother-in-law when she has children. So it is that older women love children and shower them with gifts. We have a saying that the last penny will be given to the guest and the next-to-last penny will be given to the grandchildren. When a mother slaps a child it will run to its grandmother. The sense of security is then very great; a child gets security from both parents and grandparents."<sup>Z</sup>

These are the family members important to the child. The mother-in-law and the paternal uncles will be treated later, as they have special significance to the young married woman, but it is important to point out that young children unconsciously observe the relationships — one of general hostility toward the mother-in-law (stifled in the presence of the men), one of distant respect to the father's elder brothers, and one of friendly companionship with the father's younger brothers.<sup>A,D</sup> The aunts are friendly with the children, but they are wives to their husbands — thus submissive to their husbands.

It should be emphasized again that in the newer family pattern all these people don't necessarily live under one roof, and contacts are less continuous than in the traditional joint family. However, the family ties are as yet no less strong, and there are

innumerable family gatherings, with the traditional patterns of authority and relationships.\*

It is also worth while to mention the place of servants, if there are any in the household. Here the pattern varies — from servants who are mere hirelings, rather badly treated, to those who virtually become members of the household.\* Y spoke of the fact that in her family the servants were so considered, all exercising the right to guide, to scold, to correct the children. Some ayahs have much to do with the training of children, with the transmission of legends and stories, and not infrequently it is the cook (usually a man) who is the chief story-teller.<sup>F</sup> “When my father died, I was in St. Louis. Every member of the family wrote me, even the old ayah (who had long ceased to have work to do) and the cook. Their letters were very important to me, and I would have felt neglected if they hadn’t written.”<sup>F</sup>

The family structure cannot be under-estimated in its importance in the formation of attitudes in the growing girl. In the above material and in much that follows, we see a clear pattern of patriarchal authoritarianism, and no doubt the psychological ‘father-figure’ thus established is projected to religion, government, etc. We cannot analyze the psychological depth in these relationships without access to the unconscious level. We do not know, for instance, what red pepper on a mother’s breasts during weaning, or teasing a child with a borrowed baby really does to the child. The Oedipus complex, moreover, should be more fully explored in this childhood material. As we said, this is impossible without getting below the conscious ego, and it is also impossible without descriptive material from boys. We have only an occasional reference to the fact that many boys do resent their father’s authority and that boys, more than girls, do rebel. But we can, in the above and ensuing material, seek clues to this recognized phenomenon.

One Indian woman friend (not one of the informants), who has read Freud, first said the Oedipus complex “just does not exist in India”. We talked at length about the subject, granting that Freud’s ‘libido’ may be less the ‘whole unconscious’ in India than in Western society. The Indian woman said, “I have been trying to examine my own childhood on this subject. It is true I was deeply attached to my father when I was very young—but my mother had died, and I did not feel close to my step-mother. My

father was my complete ideal, and I even said I would marry only a man like my father. Most Indian girls do like their fathers better than their mothers, though in some cases they are very afraid of them. Most boys do resent their fathers, too, only they never say so. We are taught so much self-control. I think, on reflection, that possibly the Oedipus complex does exist in India, but it never comes out. It is never expressed."

None of the informants understood, academically, the Oedipus complex; all were of the opinion (after having it explained to them) that it does not exist in India. Whether or not this complex exists universally is being discussed by anthropologists and psychologists, and there is increasing recognition that it may exist in forms different from the classic formula. We do see here the relationship between the parents and the patriarchal pattern of authority. Almost invariably, Indian mothers and sons are strongly tied to each other emotionally; fathers and daughters usually are. Sons sometimes rebel, though very much less often than in our society. The following are a few facts that may condition the classic formula, some strengthening and some modifying it. (1) Mothers—at least for girls—are the disciplinarians; fathers rarely are. This helps tie girls emotionally to their fathers. (2) In those families where there are no sons, the fathers often are deeply attached to their daughters, almost in a release of frustrated desire for sons. ("You are as seven sons to me.") (3) In many families the father is a very stern and distant authority. In such families the girls are too afraid of fathers to be close to them, and boys more deeply resent them than in those families where they are more affectionate and close. (4) Girls have very little contact, save in a casual way, with men other than their fathers, being brought up in a limited and carefully controlled group. (5) Daughters are going to leave the family group; sons are not. Fathers hate to lose their daughters. (6) Girls are in a subordinate position. There is apparently some affection given to them by way of making up for this fact. (7) There is very little intra-family competition in Indian society.

### Household Living Arrangements

"Whenever a new house is built there is a ceremony, with leaves hung over the door, doing honour to the spirit of the new home. It is

the spirit that guides the place, and the family wants its protection."<sup>o</sup> This ceremony symbolizes what is true in all countries — that the physical house is the framework within which the spiritual family lives. It makes possible the unit, with all its relationships and activities.

One notes an apparent contradiction in the fact that the general practice, largely because of poverty, is to have just one large room, in which the members of the family sleep on grass mats or mattresses (or on cots in wealthier homes), and yet there is strict privacy in the family living. No one dresses or undresses in front of others, usually not even sisters, and girls learn to put saris on without revealing any of the body.\* "Even today I am very self-conscious about my figure." This modesty is true of boys, too, and both men and women who come to America suffer a good deal over the lack of privacy in the West.\*

*F*, whose family does have individual bedrooms, even for the father and mother separately (a rare custom, but the mother was ill), said, "This idea of having individual bedrooms is entirely Western, except that married sons and their wives are supposed to have rooms to themselves". When queried about the private life of the father and mother, she said, "I don't have the faintest idea what they do. I have often wondered. But I do know that parents at a very early date stop having any romantic ideas about each other, even kissing. I think this has something to do with the marriage of the eldest son. After that there is no need for more children." "It's an ideal to have separate bedrooms, but it is not often achieved. I really don't know how parents get privacy. In my mother's day it was the custom for women not even to speak to their husbands in front of the in-laws. Of course, this isn't practised anywhere now."<sup>y</sup>

There was general agreement that the chief factor is poverty, that there are separate bedrooms if they can be afforded, and that if possible there is separation of boys and girls as they grow older. *X*, from the South, commented that most Indians are so poor they have to sleep in one room. On fine nights they sleep outside. *C* said the same thing, adding that in middle-class homes it is common to have one bedroom for the parents, another for the children. *A*, a Bengali, reported a different custom, with one room for the mother and younger children and another for the father. "Sometimes the whole family is in one bed."<sup>A</sup> *A* and *G*

said that girls like to sleep together, "and even with their kid brothers, who don't like it".<sup>A</sup> (This is not a sign of homosexuality, as might be inferred. It is a function of the need for human companionship among those with strong group and weak individual feelings.)

There was strong emphasis on the complete impossibility, in India, of members of a family, even the children older than infants, of bathing together.\* "There is not much modesty in the villages, where women often bathe together completely naked (a custom only in some parts of India), but educated girls are very finicky and modest. Education brings too much modesty. I never bathed with my sister. I will never bring myself to."<sup>X</sup> *F* admitted that sisters do sometimes bathe together, and *A* said they do "if about the same age, and only up to menarche. A girl wears her sari when she bathes, even in complete privacy, unless she is a city girl — and even city girls do it if bathing with their sisters." *A* said that this necessity of privacy is so great that when she was in camp she set the alarm and got up at four to bathe before the others. She expressed shock at having seen a group of American girls in India, stripped to bathe in a river at night. *D* spoke of the same thing but said, "Your Western customs are like those in the Punjab. Punjab women take their clothes off and go in the river."

She went on to point out that children aren't naturally modest but that older people make them so, not allowing them to bathe or undress together after they are about five.<sup>D</sup> Even in private bathing there is excessive modesty, and very frequently even today girls are taught to wash themselves through cloth, never on the bare skin.<sup>C, D</sup> A Travancore college teacher (not an informant) commented on the same custom. She said that she no longer did as she was trained — washing herself through cloth — but that she never bathed without thinking how much her mother would disapprove. This same teacher made a daily ritual of her bath and hair-washing, taking about two hours every afternoon for the procedure. She was proud of the fact that her people (Malayali) are much cleaner than most Indians, and one infers that this bathing became important to her self-esteem. Students in the same college had to have separate cubicles for showers after physical training classes. They would not share, even with sisters or best friends, and yet they were troubled by the fact that this

caused the college extra expense in the enlargement of bathing facilities. Similarly, the Indian women members of a week-end conference were conscious of causing trouble in a tight schedule by occupying the one bathing room, one at a time, each for long periods. They were horrified by the Westerners going in *en masse* and coming out, all bathed, in about ten minutes, and yet were annoyed with themselves for being incapable of doing the same thing in the interest of co-operation.

It is important to understand that bathing has meaning in addition to cleanliness in the sense in which we understand it. Y said that in spite of statements like "we always bathe every day" many people do not do so—and when they do, "it is often just to pour a little water over themselves". The process is related to spiritual purity, and thus to daily worship and to household duties — before which one should be clean. (This shows the religious aspect of the feminine role.) Traditionally four o'clock is the hour for rising,<sup>D</sup> an hour frequently mentioned in literature. The daily morning bath is a prerequisite for the *Brahmauth* (the daily worship), which should be completed before dawn.<sup>D</sup> "You cannot concentrate after dawn; there is too much noise."<sup>D</sup> "All Hindus bathe every morning, and put on clean clothes before eating. The house must be swept before eating, too. Even a dirty woman will sweep her house. Sweeping is very important, and even the yard must be swept. In Bengal the house should be swept before dawn. But poverty changes many things. If people don't have enough clothes they can't put on clean ones every day, and they become dirty. But even then they will bathe every day. It is so important to me to bathe every day, in the morning, that no matter how difficult it is for me I do it, otherwise I am unhappy all day. Sometimes I have to get up very early."<sup>D</sup> (X, from the South, disagreed that all Hindus bathe every day, though they should. "They don't always do it in the South, nor do they in the North, in spite of what they say. Many of them are dirtier than South Indians.") A and X, with much village experience, pointed out that in the villages bathing is done in the village tank or at the well or water tap. "People can't bathe at home because there is no water supply there."<sup>X</sup> Women bathe with saris on, usually washing them as they bathe.<sup>A,X</sup> (This is a procedure very familiar to the writer. Women unwrap half the sari, wash it by pounding it on a stone as they stand in the shallow water or near a jar of water

drawn from the well, then hang one end to a tree and stand at the other end, a human pillar. When the first half is dry they skilfully unwrap the other half and wash it in the same fashion.) Even when there is a water supply, as in many cities, most homes do not have running water or separate rooms for bathing. "In the poorer families, generally the boys go outside for their baths, and the girls stay inside." <sup>Y</sup> "Nowadays there is sometimes a room for bathing attached to the house, but if there isn't, at least the women will bathe inside the house." <sup>C</sup>

The latrines are never attached to the house. Sometimes they are in the courtyard, sometimes even more distant.\* <sup>Y</sup> said there should be two, one for each sex. "Even poor families have two." <sup>Y</sup> (This is not, however, the common custom.) But "for the masses there are no latrines," <sup>X</sup> said, adding, "though in urban areas there are beginning to be a few flush systems in the home." There is universal feeling that latrines are dirty places and that they must be far removed from other living. In those places where modern plumbing is introduced, as in schools, there is difficulty in persuading Indians to use the facilities and to keep them clean, so general is the feeling that latrines cannot be clean.

Courtyards, though disappearing in crowded cities, are an important part of the family living scene.\* The courtyard, in the back, "is the main living part of the house," <sup>F</sup> and many of the household tasks are done there. "It has the privacy of the home, but it is open to the sky." <sup>F</sup> "In the summer we always eat there." <sup>Y</sup> "We couldn't do without courtyards. All the household tasks, drying foods, washing, and so on, are done there. Children play there. And there has to be a courtyard in the village home so that the wife can be inside and so that the children can play inside." <sup>A</sup>

"The kitchen is generally separate from the house, though in the villages this is not always so." <sup>X</sup> (Again, the reason is functional. The smoke is thus kept out of the house.) "The poor people have one corner of the main room as the kitchen, or they may use a little verandah." <sup>X</sup> <sup>A</sup> gave the same information, and <sup>D</sup> reported that it is common in her community to have two kitchens, at separate ends of the house, for meat and vegetarian diets, with the strictest observance of segregation of the cooking vessels for the separate diets. Also, in the Punjab there are still many community kitchens, where there are many ovens and fireplaces for

common use.<sup>D, Z</sup> Fuels range from gas (found only in very modern cities, like Bombay, for the wealthier homes), to charcoal, wood, and cow-dung. For the latter fuels there are no stoves, as we understand them, but little clay fire-pots, usually on the floor. Fuel is a great problem, for Indian cooking is a long process and fuels are scarce. Hence the need for small fires with a concentration of heat.

"The big houses have dining rooms, but the majority of homes don't have them. People generally eat in the kitchen, if there is one, being careful not to cross over into the cooking area. (The line of demarcation denoting the cooking area will be discussed later.) It is easier for the mother this way, for she is sitting down while cooking. Of course if there are servants it is different." <sup>F</sup>

"We had a dining room, which we generally used, but it was a great pleasure to eat in the kitchen. It was social being there, so close to the fire." <sup>Y</sup> "We generally ate on the verandah, not in the kitchen." <sup>A</sup> C, on the other hand, said they never ate on the verandah, and X reported usually eating in the courtyard. There are rarely tables and chairs, and the family sits on mats, sometimes eating from little raised wooden trays.\*

All informants insisted that there was no special food for the men and boys, though D said that she, as a girl, was asked to diet because she was growing too fast and "boys are never restricted that way". (There seems little doubt that in the past women have been much more restricted, often getting 'what was left'.)

### Travel Arrangements

Girls are not supposed to go out on the streets alone, though boys may, but this traditional view is changing somewhat in progressive families.\* (This is consistent with the emphasis on chastity and with society's ways of ensuring it.) "We did it occasionally, but we were being forward." <sup>F</sup> "In the South and in the Punjab they do it more than in the U.P. We do it only when we get older, and even older women try to take a child with them." <sup>D</sup> As was mentioned earlier, brothers often accompany their sisters.\* "Girls in villages, up to the age of ten, do go out alone, and then after they are married they do again. It differs among educated families. Some allow it, some don't." <sup>Y</sup> It should be re-emphasized that the custom of *purdah* is virtually gone, but F said, "It gave us

quite a bit of protection to have our heads covered. We did it when we went shopping."

With the rapid development of public transportation there is increasingly less segregation of all groups — caste, sex, etc.—into their own bullock carts, tongas, etc. Trains and buses are public and they are crowded. However, there is still constant use of the 'Women's Compartments' on the trains, where many husbands firmly put their women and small children. "The women really prefer the combined compartments," *C* said, "but many men will not let them ride in them." As for transportation within cities, tongas, jutkas, rickshaws, and bicycles supplement the public buses and the few school buses that some private schools operate. Conservative families have their daughters taken to school in private conveyances, but the trend is definitely toward independent travel, as on bicycles and in public vehicles.\* This is undoubtedly an important factor that will influence traditional patterns.

### Clothing, Cosmetics, Jewellery

The fact that girls wear different clothing from boys is one of the most important differentiating factors operating in their daily living. Indian girls in all areas wear short dresses (a Western influence) or blouses and skirts (the older custom), and it is customary for them to have long hair, usually in a single pigtail.\* They know they are different from boys in their attire and in their ornamentation.\* In the lower, poorer classes, especially in the South, there is a good deal of nakedness among the younger children, more common for boys than for girls. The little boys often wear nothing but a G-string and brass 'fig-leaf' ornament. "There is very little nakedness among the upper classes."<sup>F</sup> (In fact, this is often proudly used as a distinction of superiority.) *D* reported a trend toward bobbed hair among the school girls, "But even here there is conservatism". Others agree that there is a little bobbed hair, but that one could not call it a trend, so uncommon is the practice. *B*, herself with short hair (extremely unusual for an Indian woman), lets her daughter "be a regular tomboy" in most ways, but has insisted that she keeps her long hair "at least until she is older".

Cosmetics become an important part of a girl's life. We shall treat the subject at this time, since mothers use them on their

daughters even when they are infants and small children, and girls use them themselves from the age of five or six. "Girls use them very early in the rural areas, because no one has time to do things for them. Girls in rural areas become more quickly independent in many ways, in elimination, eating, dressing, etc." <sup>X</sup> "There are not many cosmetics in India." <sup>C</sup> The emphasis is on the eyes, never on the mouth, with secondary emphasis on the hands and feet. The most important item is the *kunku*, often mistaken by Westerners for a caste mark. It is a dot, or several dots, placed in the middle of the forehead between the eyes or farther up. "They are all shapes and colours," <sup>F</sup> round black or red dots being the most common. The *kunku*, which once had marriage significance, is considered a beauty mark, but is also auspicious. "It is a bad omen to meet a woman without a *kunku* in the early morning." <sup>F</sup>

"We particularly use the *kajal*, the black around the eyes. It is made from the lampblack of castor oil lamps. (C said it is sweet oil lampblack.) This is not only for the sake of looks, but very important for the cooling effect." <sup>F</sup> All mentioned *kajal*, with agreement on its cooling properties. And all mentioned *mendhi* and *altha*, hand and foot cosmetics (together with many gestures indicating the sexual significance of the feet and hands). *Mendhi*, an orange-red substance made from crushed henna leaves, is used on the soles of the feet, the palms of the hands, and on fingernails.\* *Altha*, a red substance made from a powder, is put around the edge of the foot and is used more in the South. X mentioned the use of saffron in the South (also on hands and feet, but often on the face). "It is used by orthodox women and is considered a beauty treatment. It makes hairless." <sup>X</sup> Beauty treatments are common. It is considered good to keep the skin in good condition, and there is no use of powders to cover up skin blemishes.\* The frequent oil baths may, in a sense, be considered beauty treatments, although they are also considered healthful. "In a hot climate it is especially important to oil the skin." <sup>F</sup> (Oil for baths is so important that boarding schools issue weekly rations.) F told of a facial skin treatment with sliced raw tomatoes, and Y described the use of a mixture of flower seeds, wheat flour, and other ingredients on special occasions and before marriage for forty days in body massage. "It leaves the skin very soft and smooth." <sup>Y</sup>

"The washing and oiling of hair is very important. It is good

to wash hair with soap nuts and coconut milk. Indian women use hair oil for two reasons. One is because of the heat, the oil being cooling, and the other is that Indians don't believe in cutting or thinning their hair, and the oil keeps it in control."<sup>F</sup> (The writer has been told that hair will get gray unless oiled.) "Hair oil is the only perfume Indian women use, and hair oil is always perfumed. It is interesting, too, that practically all the flowers we put in our hair are fragrant. (Indian girls and women usually do have flowers in their hair.) I remember that father wouldn't let us use flowers in our hair or around our necks when we went to college. He thought it was too obvious. As students we are supposed to live austere, studiously, without distractions. We should have nothing that isn't essential to our appearance."<sup>F</sup> "Indian women never use scent before marriage. After marriage it is all right, and it is used on the marriage day."<sup>Y</sup>

"Any of the cosmetics used by grown-ups are all right for little girls to use. However, as girls get older, the use of cosmetics takes on a different significance. Girls see to all these things, without their mothers' help, as they grow older. It doesn't really matter when a girl starts using the *kunku* by herself, but more and more it does coincide with the beginning of consciousness of womanhood, because with the introduction of Western-style short dresses for girls the *kunku* is not generally used until the girl wears the sari. It goes with the sari as a costume and not with short dresses."<sup>F</sup>

A foreigner in India is always impressed with the amount of jewellery that Indian women and girls wear, partly because it seems inconsistent with the general poverty. But jewellery is considered wealth as well as ornament. It is wealth in the form of the family 'investments' (very few use banks) but also wealth particularly of the woman, since she does not own property. One notices lavish use of necklaces (beads and chains, often many worn simultaneously), bangles (glass, silver, gold), earrings (from tiny jewels to very heavy cylinders and rings stretching the lobes as much as four inches), anklets (often very heavy and ornate, often jingling), armlets, finger rings, nose rings, toe rings, and brooches. "Babies of both sexes wear bangles. They do not have necklaces, but a girl often does have jingling anklets — up to the age of twelve or fourteen."<sup>C</sup> Earrings are very popular, and ears are pierced any time from early infancy to about the age of ten.

The village women in the South have heavy earrings of cheap metal, and it may be there is in their size and weight some compensation for the lack of jewels. It is a style, however, that is going out, and a great many women and girls are going to doctors to have their stretched ear lobes cut and trimmed. Nose rings are used less and less, too, particularly in the North where the large, jewelled type was popular.\* "There are three types of nose rings—a small diamond, a big round metal cylinder, and a semi-circular ring. They are not common now." <sup>c</sup> "I never even had my nose pierced, though my mother wears a large, beautiful nose ring." <sup>p</sup> Toe rings are also becoming less popular,\* though they are still worn by most village women. <sup>x</sup> They may be worn only by married women, but are not, as our wedding ring, a sign of marriage. "Necklaces, of course, all girls have. These things are given them, and they also buy their own when they can." <sup>p</sup> "All girls have bangles."\* Bangles are really the one form of jewellery girls are supposed to have before marriage. Girls aren't supposed to be ornamented for any reason but their husbands' pleasure. But they do have bangles.\* "It is something a girl can have to make up for the property she does not own. It is her own, and no one can take it away from her." <sup>z</sup> Interesting is the attitude toward silver in the South. It is used for jewellery, but it is not preferred, and is generally considered to be unlucky. Indian girls are often distressed when their European friends buy silver, begging them to get gold instead.

We see an inconsistency in the use of jewellery. There is a conflict between the tradition of simplicity, especially for an unmarried woman, and a love of lavish ornamentation. It seems that jewellery, intended as adornment for husband's sakes, is a particular sign of femininity. It is also, as mentioned, linked with wealth. A woman wearing jewellery is thus not only very specifically a woman, but she gains a certain sense of prestige in the attached symbols of wealth.

We see, then, an emerging feminine personality, shaped by the personalized ideals of religious literature as well as by the living social environment. It is differentiated from the male in the pattern of relationships, in social protection, in expectations, in duties, and in dress and ornament. We see, above all, the importance of family relationships, much of a girl's training being 'social training' (effected largely through imitation), her duty

being to learn the various roles, with the proper functions and prohibitions attending each one. As with some other cultures, all sense of belonging is achieved through the observation of 'proper' relationships. With the Hindu emphasis on group social acceptance, it seems that a basic motive is to remain an intimate and respected member of the family group, and a basic fear is to incur blame and loss of affection. Social acceptance is the primary way of attaining individual self-respect, and thus the happy and secure individual is the one who is a 'good' member of the family.

It will be necessary to keep the above in mind in reading the following chapter, which will deal with the direct and indirect training in the childhood period.

# 3

## *Training*

WE SEE IN this section the general customs and prohibitions, punishments and rewards, household duties, education, play, religious duties, and legends and stories affecting girls. In some measure it depicts conscious training ; in many ways it shows an unconscious interiorization of the socially accepted norms. The child, though usually attending school and usually expected to help the family, is still a somewhat free person, especially as regards responsibilities. Most of the training, as will be seen, is social training.

### **Customs, Manners, Prohibitions**

The chief emphasis in the training of girls for womanhood is on 'modesty', and this word is used constantly with this meaning in the informants' explanations. "Modesty is linked with femininity. We never think of men as modest. And femininity involves not being aggressive, although it permits women to be aggressive in times of stress and emergency."<sup>F</sup> Femininity, it must be emphasized, is revered and honoured. "It is an ideal."<sup>\*</sup> This is so true that there are few tomboys among the girls, in the Western sense, although the term is used, more to designate a rebellion against the taboos of femininity than to indicate being like a boy. *B*, the only one to say girls did wish they were boys, described her tomboy daughter as one who sings, dances, whistles.<sup>B</sup> Furthermore, girls do not see 'masculine women,' and thus do not have the opportunity to identify with them.\* "My

sister's mother-in-law was very unusual. She rode horseback, went out alone without fear, socialized—and yet she was very feminine.”<sup>F</sup> “My mother, a lecturer and college professor, played boys’ games, even football, but she was very feminine.”<sup>Z</sup> “Girls very seldom want to be boys and are generally content to be girls. We don’t feel inferior or superior to boys. We each have our separate roles. Occasionally girls do want to do some of the things boys do, and though I have never known any girls who want to be boys, I have several times heard ‘I wish I were a boy and could do that’. I never thought of wanting to be a boy myself. It was quite unthinkable.”<sup>Y</sup> “Girls absolutely do not want to be boys. Why should they? Womanhood is fine, sensitive, something to be protected, kept secure.”<sup>Z</sup> The above remarks are wholly consistent with the traditional differentiation of sexes and of functions, symbolized by the story of creation (the Creator dividing himself into male and female), and by the complementary pairs of masculine and feminine godheads. The traditional concept of equality holds that woman’s function as goddess of the hearth and of creation is equal, though not similar, to the masculine function. Hindu women today, in fact, do not see the struggle for ‘equal rights’ as the competitive demand for the *same* functions as those performed by men. They demand only the recognition and honour due to their role (though it is true they are entering politics and professions, feeling that they are needed in them). It is, still, a non-competitive society.

Thus it is that the underlying principle in the training of girls is “not to behave like a boy,” and girls are constantly in the company of women who are consciously feminine. For instance, although both smoking and drinking are disapproved for all Indian society,\* men are given much more latitude in these things. Women would permanently damage their status.\* A few women do smoke (not counting the village women in some areas, with whom it is an old custom) without too much social ostracism, but they are wholly within the upper (and Westernized) social circles. Drinking is completely outside the limits.<sup>F, Y</sup> Girls, thus, unconsciously absorb the accepted pattern of femininity and do not have personal decisions to make on these matters.

The Western influences mentioned above do not affect the average girl, and she is concerned only with the host of prohibitions stemming from ancient Hinduism. *B* listed them thus: “Whistling,

acting like a tomboy, being too free with eye and arm movements, walking with a long stride, sitting or standing with the legs apart, crossing the legs when sitting, standing with arms akimbo, showing uninhibited behaviour when company is present." She emphasized the free arm and eye movements as being "especially bad" (their place in Hindu dancing illustrates the sexual connotations), and elaborated on uninhibited behaviour. "Actually, one must be in control all the time, must talk with composure, in a low-pitched tone, never with raised voice. And never, never touch a boy."<sup>B</sup> *C* spoke of the same things, emphasizing immodest sitting. *X* said girls learned to walk with short steps, keeping the arms in. "It is really very self-conscious, this walking with a beautiful gait."<sup>X</sup> "Girls must walk softly and gracefully, not swinging their arms like a boy. It is very bad to wink. The important thing is to be proper. One must sit properly, move properly, dress properly. We don't go around the house undressed, as girls in America do. It is not a question of 'not being allowed'. We just don't, because it is not acceptable."<sup>Y</sup>

As to walking, *B*, the most emancipated, said, "Even today I walk as I was taught—with short steps, each foot carefully in front of the other, not swinging my arms." *Y*, as a child, was in trouble over her grandmother's insistence that she walk with her head down, as befits a woman, and her teacher's insistence that she walk erect. Wanting to obey both 'superiors,' she had her dilemma solved by the teacher's instruction to walk with her head down at home, since she had to respect grandmother."<sup>Y</sup>

Some of the informants did not consider sitting cross-legged as mannish, and sit that way themselves,<sup>A, X, Z</sup> but insist that "sitting must not be ungainly."<sup>A</sup> The others had been taught not to sit cross-legged, but with both legs to one side, or with one knee up. "I think this may be because the figure is covered better that way."<sup>F</sup> All agreed that much more emphasis is put on proper sitting after a girl reaches puberty, and that the wearing of the sari is important partly because of its function in proper sitting.\*

All but *F* mentioned whistling as 'being like a boy,' recalling being corrected. *A*, who said that girls are scolded more than boys, complained ruefully that girls are scolded for not keeping their clothes properly, for singing too loudly in the bathroom, for scolding their brothers, and for whistling. She remembered a friend, who at fourteen was still spanked constantly for whistling.

('Spank,' as used by the informants, rarely means striking on the buttocks. It is usually a slap.) "I remember a group of girls in school," *C* said, "who had whistled and had to stand outside the room for an hour. No Indian girl whistles on the road, but boys do it freely. I don't know the reason, but I think it is considered that immodest girls respond to boys' whistling." *Z*, herself having been severely checked for whistling as a girl, quoted the apparently universal saying, which she learned in childhood, 'Whistling women and a crowing cock are an abomination to God'. *X* could not recall training and correction on whistling. "Few girls do whistle, but it is not that they are taught not to. They simply don't whistle."<sup>x</sup>

"There were many things we couldn't do as girls," *F* said, "but some things were true for boys, too. For instance, we couldn't visit our classmates, I'm afraid for purely snobbish reasons."

We note, now, those prohibitions involving relationships. The taboo against touching members of the opposite sex is very important.\* (This point was often mentioned by the informants, no doubt because they were so conscious of the Western freedom in this matter.) "My mother never said 'You mustn't touch your brother,' so in our family we were free, but the neighbours scolded us." There is no tradition of physical male-female freedom, and children witness no examples of it. "There is no holding of hands, even in the home, except sometimes today with young married couples in the presence of friends of the same age. It is never done in the presence of older or younger persons."<sup>c</sup> *A* made the same point about couples holding hands "or even touching each other, in any public place. And there is a special taboo about men striking women in anger." *A* admitted this last rule is not well-observed in the lower classes. "These things happen in lower societies, because people are drunk and don't know any better," *D* added, but insisted, "though even in villages brothers never beat sisters". She conceded that husbands do beat wives (though they shouldn't), going on to say that if a man does beat his wife, outsiders ought not to interfere. Quarrels between a man and wife always come out right. Interference only makes the wife defend her husband." (This is a fact that has caused many Westerners to say, "You just can't help these people.")

There is no difference in the training of eating manners for girls and boys, save in the general feeling that boys "get away with

more." \* "They are all the same things—don't soil the fingers ('like the South Indian'), don't mess up the food, don't touch the hand to the mouth, don't put the tongue out to reach the food, don't use the left hand, don't forget to wash before and after eating." <sup>F</sup>

The Laws of Manu (legalist Hinduism, late centuries, B.C. and early A.D.) were very explicit about the sin of men eating meals with women, but none of the informants thought the traditional custom of women serving men and then eating later was the result of these laws.\* (They may be mistaken. The laws were very explicit, and have been widely quoted in Hindu literature.) There was some contradiction on this point, but, in general, the informants insisted that men and women eat together now—but also that to serve the men and see to their needs is a 'proud privilege' and the willing duty of wives. "Women represent the goddess of food, and it is their duty to serve guests as well as their men. It is an expression of respect as well as a necessity." <sup>Z</sup> Particularly in the North, where *chapatis* must be made individually and freshly, making much more work than the preparation of rice, there is the practical necessity of cooking for the men and serving them as they eat, unless there are servants. "When there are servants, all eat together. It is the ideal, really, which is shown by the picture of Rama and Sita sitting together at the temple, being served food together. It signifies doing things together." <sup>Z</sup> *D* admitted that eating separately has been the general custom, "but now the girls are going to school and can't take the time." She went on to say that it is all right to eat with the husband, but very bad to eat before he comes home. "There is a saying that those women who eat first 'don't keep their husbands attached,' for a good husband will come home earlier if his wife is hungry. It shows that he cares for her." Girls, at any rate, observe these customs, whichever ones are practised, and themselves take greater and greater part in the duty of serving. Again, if there are no servants, they will also scrub and polish the plates and utensils.

*Z* spoke of a habit she and the other children of her household had that was constantly checked by the grandmother, that of rushing to the door when guests arrived. They liked to do this, partly because their parents wanted them to meet the guests at the door with a proper show of hospitality. "But my grandmother didn't want us to run to meet men. It was not modest," <sup>Z</sup>

"The training of children is not so much a question of reward

or punishment, for our culture makes children so meek. They just do as their elders tell them. There is great respect for elders. (This is also an ancient Hindu law.) Children don't question their elders. They accept everything. The educated urban girl is today beginning to question the advice of the old grandmother, but she resists her passively, without being openly aggressive. For one thing, she speaks English and granny can't, which gives her a feeling of superiority. The granny dominates too much, and girls are so docile. When educated, they become less docile, though even some educated girls are blind, fighting about equal rights and divorce, without awareness of the deep social implications." x

"Respect for older people is an absolute in India." \* And respect, in the informants' explanations, involves obedience. (They first resisted the idea of 'obedience', not liking the connotation of force. But they later used the word themselves, explaining that it is a concept taken for granted.) "All are brought up to strict obedience to anyone older. Even an elder sister. Only in the case of brother and sister very near in age is there any variation. Obedience involves a superior-inferior relationship, partly in sex, but particularly in age." <sup>F</sup> "We had to be respectful of older people. We were allowed some freedom in asking questions of father and mother, but there could be no funny answers." <sup>G</sup> This sense of distance, as a result of respect, is seen in many ways. "Respect for older people keeps one from knowing them well," C said, but she did not question its virtue, in fact, asked for an explanation for the "terrible lack of respect for older people in the West," listening to an explanation with disapproving expression. This respect has many overt manifestations, such as rising when superiors enter a room, sitting on the ground while the teachers sit in chairs, never disputing the word of an older person (even when one knows it is false), serving them first at meals, etc.\*

Related to this feeling of respect is the treatment of names and titles. The most orthodox families use no names. 'Elder Brother,' 'Younger Brother,' 'Grandfather,' 'Middle Sister,' 'Younger Sister,' save for the very young children, are used.\* Elder sisters are often *didi*, elder brothers *dada*.<sup>D</sup> First names are used more and more, <sup>C, F</sup> but usually with the ending *bhai* (brother) or *bahen* (sister). Except for the very Westernized, husbands and wives rarely use first names for each other.\* "Sometimes a husband is *khan* (chief), and very Western people say 'darling'. But in

most families they don't take the name of the husband. He is 'so-and-so's father. Sometimes the husband will call his wife by name, but not in front of elders. He can, but he won't." <sup>Y</sup> "The husband sometimes does call his wife by her first name nowadays, but he is showy and not in the best taste." <sup>D</sup> The wife may never use his name at all, even to him. She always refers to him in the third person. <sup>A, C, F</sup> "This is so strictly followed that in court a wife sometimes points to the name of her husband written down, without speaking it." <sup>B</sup> "Sometimes husbands and wives call each other by the names the children give them, like 'ma'." <sup>F</sup> "It is a question of respect." <sup>Y</sup> "Indian women are known by their husbands' names, or by their fathers'. I remember being very surprised once as a child to find a strange name in a book of my mother's. She explained it was her name, in the Western style, but I had never supposed my mother could be anybody but Mrs. T—— S—— (my father's name). I myself have only recently been Miss P—— S——. At home I was always Miss T—— S——, using my father's name. I am not sure what I shall do when I return to India." <sup>Z</sup> The force of this tradition is seen in a recent election in India, when the names of thousands of women were stricken from voting registers since they had, despite strict instructions, used their husbands' and fathers' names instead of their own.

One frequently sees an Indian man walking about six steps in front of a woman, the two carrying on a conversation as they go along. <sup>D</sup>, admitting that this often happens, "even with us here in the States," insisted that it is because the women cannot keep up with the man. <sup>C</sup> said it is a part of woman's modesty to follow, but also a part of tradition, according to which a man goes first in order to meet the danger of the jungle and the road. (This is also the explanation of three Indian men. They agreed that there is today no consciousness of this original meaning, but that the tradition has been unconsciously continued in modern life.) <sup>A</sup> said it is not often done in the cities but is common with the lower middle class in the villages, a custom still so prevalent that "even boys over here forget and go first, if they are not sensitive". All insisted that men are not trained to lead, women to follow, but that children grow up noticing and copying these patterns.\* It is interesting to note that Abbé Dubois, in the early nineteenth century, found this custom the general one.

Similar to this practice, but not mentioned by the urban informants, is that of women (in the villages or poorer sections of the cities) carrying heavy burdens, such as loads of wood, while their husbands walk along unburdened. It is significant that Indian men and women questioned on this matter (during a previous study) expressed surprise that anyone should think this is the custom. Then they admitted it was true, saying they had never thought about it. Two men and one woman explained that it has nothing to do with lack of respect or consideration for women, that it is a question of function. (This is entirely consistent with the Hindu view of separate function). Wood, clay pots, cow-dung, and anything relating to the household are within the woman's domain. Men will carry other things, including the small children. (This is the writer's observation, too.)

The informants were often puzzled by questions on 'teaching' and 'learning'. Some insisted that imitation is the chief factor; others were not sure how they would explain the process. "Growing up," according to X, "is not so much a question of imitation. It is just that children learn the socially approved patterns. For instance, they don't have to be told that they cannot be friendly with boys in other families. And they witness things like a wife's helping her husband with his bath. Other women tease her about it, but everyone knows it is her duty. It is a group idea, and children learn that way."

In view of the restraints placed on girls and the great differentiation between men's and women's social functions, it is not surprising that one does not find the element of competition, so pronounced in the West. There is too much emphasis on function and on harmony to permit it. (Ancient Hindu literature is full of 'rules' for the attainment of social harmony. It could be said to be a primary aim.) "We must teach our children to live with others. We must not create the spirit of competition in them."<sup>c</sup> "There is no competition in India. Competition is animalism. It is barbaric, silly, unnecessary."<sup>F</sup> "There is no competition between boys and girls, because girls don't want to be like boys. There is too much emphasis on the importance of femininity. But this may change if India becomes an industrial society, for then women will have to compete with men and will probably want to be like them."<sup>V</sup>

Noticeable, too, is the lack of inhibition, as we understand the

term, since one might expect a great deal of inhibition as a result of so many prohibitions. (Modern Hindu psychologists object to the application of the Western concept of inhibition to Hindu society.) Only the deviant, Westernized *B*, felt that there is inhibition, the others saying the question does not arise. "Indians don't feel inhibited," *F* insisted. "One is not a human being if one lets go with inhibitions to the extent that I have seen in America. 'Suppression,' 'repression,' 'inhibition' are terms and concepts learned in America. We never thought of them in India. They don't arise."<sup>F</sup> "The *only* thing I ever resented, and tried to defy, was not being allowed to go somewhere with my parents. In general there is *no* feeling of wanting to do something that one shouldn't."<sup>Z</sup>

"Deviants? I don't know any!" *C* expressed her surprise. Only *B*, a self-confessed deviant, thought the question relevant. "There are no deviants among the girls," *Z* said, giving the general opinion voiced also by the others. "Boys do sometimes rebel. Never girls. But it is not subjugation. It is much more a feeling of security. We know that our parents know best."<sup>Z</sup>

### Punishments

It is apparent from the material already presented that there is a great deal of identification and imitation in the development of Hindu girls, especially since they live in a limited world of people. The chief reward is in 'being a good girl', 'being a little *Sita*'.\* It is also evident that there is considerable emphasis on punishment as a means of training. "I'm afraid there is much more punishment than reward," *C* said. "Children are trained too much that way." "In the East there is much less conscious guiding of the child than in the West. There is a lot of punishment; there are a lot of spankings."<sup>A</sup> (As indicated earlier, 'spanking' probably does not refer to striking on the buttocks. *C* was the only one of the informants who said "it is sometimes on the buttocks". *Y* said it means "slapping on the face, or perhaps shoulders". *Z* said it is always slapping on the face alternating with hugging the child in affection, and it is much less a physical punishment intended to hurt than a reminder that the offender has been inconsiderate. The writer has seen very little striking on the buttocks; slaps on the head and shoulders being the common form of physical punishment. Westerners have often caused deep resentment

with the use of Western 'spanking,' which seems to have a sexual connotation to the Indian.)

One does not have to live in India long to discover that the true punishment is a social one, with loss of prestige in the group. (That is why it has been so ineffective to jail a man. To be jailed by the foreign tyrant increases one's prestige.) This view of punishment is clearly discernible in the descriptions given by the informants, though they differ in admission of physical punishments. "Ours are social punishments, and much more effective than they would be in the United States."<sup>F</sup> "India is not individualistic, so the question of punishment doesn't arise as in the United States. We say, 'Don't do that, or your father won't speak to you.' We are brought up to respect our parents for their mature experience and wisdom. Historically, up to Mogul times, girls were very free, even to having to consent to marriage under Vedic law. But then times grew very difficult, and the concept of parental authority grew. Girls realize their parents know best. If they want to rebel they say their 'no's long before marriage. The mother will occasionally slap her daughter, but this is not often necessary. There is obedience, yes. The 'must' is there. And there is quite a lot of submission. In her whole life a girl sees her mother, her grandmother, other women, always respecting the male, giving him the best food, seeing to his rest and comfort. She learns this way more than by punishment. She wants to be like these women, like Sita."<sup>Z</sup>

Most of the informants described the 'worst' punishment as the threat of not being spoken to. "No child can stand that."<sup>C, Y</sup> They explain that children really want to please their parents. "The only punishment I ever had was scolding, but it was very effective. I did not want to displease my mother again."<sup>G</sup> But most conceded the existence of a good deal of physical punishment. "There is physical punishment up to the age of twelve for girls as well as boys. The whacking is done by the mother; the father rarely touches them. But after that age there is a lessening of physical punishment and an increase of psychological punishment. It involves a loss of parental affection, chiefly of the father. My father's saying 'I won't love you' was much worse than being whacked. If there is rebellion beyond this point, which is very rare, besides the withdrawal of love and approval, the girl is beaten, no matter how old she is."<sup>B</sup> "We were punished more

often by our mother, because we were more often disobedient to her. I can't ever remember my father punishing me. Hindus think boys should not touch girls. A father might, in a very serious case, lock a girl up, but he would not beat her."<sup>D</sup> "It is common, too, to make the child say before God, 'I will not do this again'. The mother says that if you do it again God will punish you, and your father will not like it. There are physical punishments, too, in some families, sometimes very severe. But girls obey through both love and fear. It depends on the personality of the father. There is much desire for approval. The traditional obedience is very bad, I think. We respect our parents too much; that is why we are so conscious of the kind of punishments we have. If we don't have approval we feel we have lost something."<sup>C</sup>

Again there was regretful insistence that boys are favoured. "They are not punished if they strike a girl, though they shouldn't do it, but girls are severely punished if they strike a boy."<sup>X</sup> "Boys can do many things contrary to the parents' wishes, girls cannot."<sup>D</sup> "We were just girls, so we had much better treatment than if there had been boys in the family too. We got away with a lot."<sup>F</sup> "We expect so much of girls, from the age of seven—much more than from boys. They must adjust much more. Boys are punished much less. They can slap a girl, but girls can't slap boys. Girls are told, 'You are a woman.'"<sup>C</sup>

### Rewards, Privileges, Gifts

"In a way we have no sense of responsibility for privileges. Much of what we do is not based on reason, though that does not mean we are barbaric. But we don't think often in terms of privileges."<sup>P</sup> Questions about rewards, privileges, and gifts brought few positive answers, with a general consensus that girls are given what they need, up to the financial limits of the family, and don't want or expect more.\* Little children get many gifts from doting grandmothers and aunties, and those girls much attached to their fathers receive gifts from them. "Father used to bring us presents often—for no special reason."<sup>G</sup>

Indian girls do not normally have spending money of their own, although this is conditioned greatly by the financial status of the family.\* It is significant that the informants did not feel

that this matter is of any importance and were rather surprised at the question. "Most girls don't want much. They know their parents will do their best."<sup>c</sup> "We had some money, as students, for lunch, and could sometimes go without lunch so as to buy little things. But we have all the money of the home at our disposal. Our families give us what we need, if they are able. Yes, it is true that we have to ask our mother for things. We would expect to do that."<sup>f</sup> A said that girls do not as a rule have any spending money of their own, except for an occasional gift. She thought that perhaps they do want some, more than is supposed for bangles, sweets, and articles at fairs. But she went on to say that Indian girls are not conditioned to much wanting. Many of her friends have their fathers buy for them, even clothes, they so distrust their own judgment and buying ability. Her own fiancé's sisters never go shopping alone and have their father or brother accompany them.

This custom may be peculiar to Bengal, for other informants pointed out that girls and women are doing more and more of the buying and marketing, and the ability to do so is one of the reasons wives with some education are desired.<sup>c, f</sup> D said that in some ways boys have less freedom now, girls more. "Girls are consulted on the budget more than boys, though they very rarely have any money of their own to spend. We collected money and gave it to our mother. Whatever we wanted we got. We did not need money."<sup>d</sup> "Some families give small allowances, both to girls and boys, but this is progressive and rare. The orthodox don't do it. It's not cultural."<sup>x</sup> (This is entirely consistent with the tradition of the dependence of women.)

Apparently it is not customary for birthdays to be celebrated. All but two informants gave negative answers, D saying birthdays are sometimes celebrated, as in her home, "but very seldom," and Z saying, "Every birthday a girl is given presents of clothes and jewels by her relatives. It becomes a part of her dowry."<sup>z</sup>

The eldest child, girl or boy, enjoys the honour, each year, of *Kojagiri* (the day of the eldest child). (It is really a harvest festival, honouring Lakshmi, goddess of good fortune.) On that day, the full moon day of the seventh Hindu calendar month, the eldest child is given "services" (such as massage) and something new. As he grows older, he spends the night out in the full moon, drinking milk and milk products, and playing. This is done because the

eldest child always has to work very hard, helping the parents.”<sup>c</sup>

*C* and *D* described what *C* called *Hadaga* and *D* Girls Day or Devi Worship (Goddess Worship), a custom some of the other informants had heard about but had not experienced. In *C*’s description, “If a man has a small daughter, or even if he has not, he invites little girls in, each evening for nine days. They sing songs ; he gives them sweets. Each little girl goes to many houses. The girls are invited just for fun, for enjoyment. I think it has something to do with the worship of the elephant and Vishnu and with the worship of the rainy season.” *D* described the event thus : “There is much contradiction in India. Girls are both respected and not respected. Small girls, before puberty, during the *Nauras-tras* (nine days, coming every six months), are treated as ‘little goddesses’. A man will invite them in odd numbers, whether he has daughters or not. If seven girls are invited then two boys may also be invited, but only up to the age of five or six. Boys are not important in this business. Girls are invited to the home, given feast food, *pan* (betel nut), and sometimes utensils and new clothes, though this is done less nowadays. Their feet are touched, for they are considered like goddesses. I had this done to me many times when I was a little girl. I liked it very much to think that others would touch my feet and consider me a little goddess. The touching of feet is more important than the food and gifts. This invitation of little girls is often done in gratitude for a child’s getting well. Also, in the lower middle class, again in gratitude for some lucky thing, if a man has no daughter he will say to another man that he will arrange the marriage of one of his daughters paying for the marriage and considering the girl as his daughter.”<sup>d</sup>

### Household Duties

We have seen from the above material much that pertains to the household duties of girls. Girls are trained functionally for their future life, and as household duties are important, they become a large part of a girl’s “education”. (Indian women in this country have often remarked on the ridiculousness of having domestic science taught in schools. They cannot conceive of homes in which the girls don’t learn this important aspect of feminine life.) Girls are expected to help serve meals and to clean and polish the plates, unless there are servants—in some cases even if there

are servants.\* They are also expected to learn to cook, but are not pushed much in this respect until after puberty, and, again, if there are servants the expectation is much less.\* "They must know how to cook, and like to, before they are married. They are taught at no special age, and it depends on how much they are needed in the home, but it is important to learn cooking early. Girls have to do everything—sew, get cow-dung and wood, sweep, clean, carry water, work in the fields (if they are in villages), and care for the younger children."<sup>x</sup> "Girls like to cook. It does not have to be forced on them. As small children they play with cooking toys. Real cooking begins at about nine or ten."<sup>y</sup>

The cleaning of grains, the grinding of grains, and the preparation of vegetables take a long time in India.\* Furthermore, every month during the mother's menstruation periods, the girls (or even the husbands) must do the cooking. "At that time the girls learn to make simple things."<sup>d</sup> Z, member of a scholarly family, said her case was very rare since she did not have to learn to cook. G helped a little, but was so busy with school that she was asked to do very little. "But that was unusual."<sup>g</sup> D, also, had little to do. "In my case my parents had lost many children. We were the only two, and not made to do much. But girls usually help their mothers with the father's clothes, with the preparation of food, with the supervision of servants. They start about at eight. Some girls want to do things, to be like women; others must be coaxed."<sup>d</sup> The caring for the men's clothes assumes great importance. Poorer families cannot afford the service of dhobis (laundrymen), and the girls and women do the washing, but even when the clothes are washed by dhobis they are arranged and prepared for use by the women of the household.\* There is some emphasis on sewing, but not much, especially in the villages. Indian clothes are very simple, and there are many tailors for those jobs that require stitching. Most girls do learn a good deal about mending.\*

As mentioned above, there is increased attention to marketing as a woman's function, and therefore girls have to learn about it.<sup>c, f</sup> "Women know quality better."<sup>f</sup> Only A and D thought it was not the job of women and that men would continue to do the marketing. Apparently there are regional differences in this matter.

When there are servants in the household, much thought has to be given to the management of these servants, who are expected

to take orders and not to assume responsibility. Sweeping and cleaning are done by the girls and women, unless there is a servant for these things (this work is not within the function of a cook). Sweepers are low-caste people, whose chief function is to clean the latrines. Those families who do not have their own sweeper will have the use of municipal or village sweepers. Cleaning the latrine is never the function of any family member, although sweeping the floors and streets often is. Sweeping is very important, and Western visitors to India are often impressed by the absence of litter.

In the villages and also among the poorer classes in cities, the collecting of fuel becomes a daily necessity, usually relegated to the girls, and, in fact, so important a contribution to the family welfare that it sometimes conflicts with the education of girls. Cooking in India is done almost entirely in little clay fire pots, with charcoal, wood, or cow-dung as fuel, and in general it is a long process requiring a lot of fuel. Wood is scarce and expensive, but if it is available, girls and women spend a lot of time collecting it and carrying it home. Charcoal is more expensive, and thus not available for many. Very rarely, as in Bombay, gas is used in the better homes. Cow-dung remains the most important poor man's fuel (to the detriment of the soil), partly because it is constantly available and partly because it is an excellent fuel, burning with an intense, steady, and almost smokeless heat. Girls collect it in baskets, following the herds in the cities and out at pasture, and mix it with straw and pat it in cakes to dry on walls and trees.

Similarly, it is a frequent sight to see girls and women cutting grass with small sickles and carrying the grass home in bundles. This is done in cities by those having ponies or cows to feed, and it is widely done in the villages. There is, otherwise, no way to get feed for domestic animals.

The more modern cities have water systems, and the wealthier homes have a water tap in their own courtyard, and sometimes even in the kitchen and bathroom. The much more common picture, however, is the water tap on the street corner, or the well or tank in the village. These become meeting-places for women and girls, who spend much of their time gathering water in brass and clay containers, polishing their brass vessels with ashes and straw, gossiping as they work.

The care of younger children is an important duty for girls,

especially of the oldest girl, and this is something almost never done by boys.\* "Brothers will help if there are no daughters, but they don't like to."<sup>D</sup> "Girls don't bathe or feed the babies and small children. They just watch them."<sup>F</sup> Indians grow up loving children, and women seem never to resent the many hours they spend with smaller children, the experience, in fact, making them look forward to having their own. Their function, as caretakers, is that of "watching," and they see that infants don't get into danger. There is much emphasis on "no's" and "don'ts" (so noticeable, too, in ayahs' care of children), and little is done about training for responsibility. The children are kept from eating dirty things and are kept reasonably clean. As discussed previously, toilet training is not stressed, and there is no attitude of sin or shame attached to urination or defecation.

"Children are not neglected as in the United States. They are always with older children or adults."<sup>F</sup> Neglect to an Indian means being left alone, in a play-pen or in a fenced backyard, without the attention, love, and affection of older persons.

### Education

The number of girls going to school in India is still small, though the law now makes education free and compulsory (but can't be enforced fully, as there are not enough schools). Education, until recently, has been considered "education for life", not for literacy, and hence for girls it has consisted chiefly of training for marriage. A few girls have always been allowed academic training, but this was usually in the home, under tutors, and the concept of education for girls in outside institutions is a new one for India. According to the 1921 census, literacy in India was less than 2 per cent, with the proportion of girls to boys 1 to 4 in primary schools, 1 to 18 in middle schools, and 1 to 34 in high schools. In 1949 the total proportion of girls to boys had risen to 1 to 3.3. It is estimated that the general literacy is now 12 per cent, with a 60 per cent male increase and 150 per cent female increase over 1939, but these figures are already obsolete, as Independent India has made very rapid progress in education. It has been part of a national effort so widespread that many college students have spent their free time during the day and during the year in teaching illiterate adults to read and write.

It is difficult to get all village girls, the bulk of the girl population, into schools, since the girls are needed at home and in the fields, since the learning they get in schools has little practical or functional value, and since there are not enough schools. The majority of schools are private, with fees. This picture is fortunately changing in the recent drive for better education, and at least in the cities "going to school" has become the norm. The tradition is growing that "a girl must go to school if she wants a chance for a good marriage". Hence even modern education remains, for the Hindu girl, a road to marriage.\* All informants agreed that a girl betters her marriage chances by going up to Matriculation (roughly the equivalent of high school), but that increasingly the penalty of higher education is the decrease of marriage chances.

The common picture in the cities, then, is for girls to go off to school each day, whereas just one generation ago many of them would have had no formal schooling. The informants insisted that there is no pressure against girls' going to school now, but admitted there still has to be some kind of pressure toward their going.\* "Generally girls want to go to school. Partly because so few get the chance to go. Boys, on the other hand, often try to avoid school. But girls like school, not so well as their homes, which are more secure, but they like school. They are usually better in their studies than the boys for that reason."†

G's mother put great emphasis on education, visiting G often at school, encouraging her promotions and continually pushing the idea of learning. "Because we had no boys and because I was good in my studies, I was treated as a boy. I was encouraged to think I was doing something for the family by going to school. It was very important to my family that I was doing something for it. They just worship education. My youngest sister was even disliked by my mother because she didn't like to go to school." G then laughed, and said, "Now my mother is sick of my going to school. She wants me to stop, to come home, marry, and settle down." (G had just obtained an Ed.D.)

Most of the informants said that co-education is not common in India, except in the kindergarten and some colleges, and doubted that it will increase.\* "There are just too many problems when boys and girls are mixed."† The writer has observed attempts in mission schools to mix boys and girls, in which cases the girls

were so withdrawn in the presence of the boys that they were taken out and put in girls' schools, where they participated freely and seemed much happier. X said, "The complete segregation of girls makes for femininity, which is what India wants." C, however, from a progressive urban area, said, "Co-education is increasing. Such schools have to provide separate playgrounds for boys and girls, of course, and girls don't enjoy the same facilities. But our society expects physical skills more from the boys than from the girls, and though girls take part in all physical activities in the schools and colleges, the majority are not interested in them. Fine Arts or Home Management attract them more, and they try to attain great skill in these fields." C went on to elaborate on the social life of girls. "Whether in schools or out, the Indian girls get no opportunity of social life as such. They do not join any clubs or go out with boys. The institution of dating is non-existent in our country. Even though we have some mixed schools boy-girl relationship is far from free. In some girls' schools the authorities are very strict about the behaviour of girls. They do not allow the girls to go out of the school independently. The authorities take every precaution to prevent the girls from developing any contact with the boys."

What are the social attitudes in the schools? Do they reinforce or contradict those of the home? Several informants were surprised at this question, indicating that it was inconceivable that any institution would contradict the attitudes of the home, that these attitudes were those of India and not of any one part of it. "One learns the same things—obedience, duty, compromise." \*

In general the girls' schools are no different from the boys' schools, though there are some differences in curriculum and in the supervision of the pupils. The pattern is authoritative and autocratic, with great emphasis on the status of the teachers, "respect" for them indicating distance, an impossibility of friendship.\* (It is usually difficult to stimulate initiative among Indian students. They wait patiently and passively to be told what to do. The fact that this is not true with those going to progressive schools seems to prove the force of the traditional school.) Teachers are there to teach, to guide. This distance between teacher and student is maintained in many ways—teachers sit in raised positions, students carry teachers' books, pupils stand when reciting or when teachers or guests enter the room. There are many rules, with

strict obedience expected and with a tradition of punishments.\* "The punishments are usually physical. I remember that eight or ten pupils every day were made to stand for an hour for not doing their work. I also remember a whole class being punished by two ruler hits each for high-pitched voices."<sup>A</sup> "One reason there are many punishments is that most of the teachers are poorly trained. They do not understand psychology."<sup>X</sup> As is often the case with this type of discipline, it is not "bad" to break the rules in the absence of the teacher or monitor, but it is "bad" to get caught in an infraction. "There is no teaching of responsibility."<sup>A</sup> The curriculum is rigid, with little or no choice of subject, and the goals and rewards of honours and certificates are all obtained through difficult competitive examinations.\* These examinations, a Western imposition (brought via British education), cause unusual tension and anxiety, even to the point of many nervous breakdowns. It seems reasonable to assume that they are a particular hardship in a society that is non-competitive, that has many ways of decreasing pressure on the individual.

The above is the increasingly common picture of education, an education based largely on the British system. There have been a few village schools of an entirely different type, "where teacher and pupils are on an equal level, learning together," an ancient type somewhat revived on a small scale by the nationalists.<sup>F,Y</sup> But they number very few.\* There are, too, some schools based on Gandhi's educational principles. *F* remarked that her sister attended such a school and that "her values became different". She expressed a wish that such schools were not so rare.

"Village people on the whole don't send their children to schools. There are a few schools, especially for boys, where children memorize the tables under an ill-tempered teacher. Very few girls go, and the few that do quit in a year."<sup>A</sup> This statement, made by a Bengali, seems not to be the situation all over India, and it is interesting that the socially inferior South has had more education than the North.

There are, too, many girls who have their education at home, as has always been socially sanctioned, although this becomes less common as facilities for girls' education increase. "Father was a great advocate of female education. Mother had also imbibed that spirit. She knew Hindi, Urdu, and a little English. Father believed in simple living and high thinking. He tried to inculcate the same spirit in us children. He was against sending us to schools,

because he thought that schools in India were not doing the proper job. We were all educated at home by private tutors. Father did not believe in examinations but mother did. Sister was sent to the Punjab Middle School examinations and stood first in the province." <sup>D</sup>

This description of education for girls in India may seem a description of an intolerable situation, but it is not so to an Indian girl. Within the structure, which she knows and accepts, there is usually a great deal of human understanding and human enjoyment, with all girls experiencing the same things. Certainly the average girl gets her broadened horizons from school. As in all countries, some like school and some don't. But those who don't take it without rebellion, as a part of their lives. It is to be accepted.\*

Important in the psychological attitudes of the schoolgirls is a predisposition to hurt feelings, usually manifested in relation to some teacher. This seems so much a part of adolescence that it will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

Before leaving the subject of education it is interesting to note a ceremony, described by *D* (*Upanayana* in the Hindu sacred domestic ceremonies). "When a boy starts learning the alphabet (which can be at home, before he starts going to school), there is a ceremony, a *hawan* ceremony, with the priest present. Ganesh (elephant-headed god of wisdom) is worshipped as the god of learning, so they write Ganesh on the child's slate and make him write one or two words. Then sometimes sweets are distributed. This ceremony should be done only with boys, though it is done in very exceptional cases for girls—when there are only girls. My father did it for girls, but then he gave girls birthday celebrations, too, and that is very rare." <sup>D</sup>

### Play, Toys

Small boys and girls play together quite freely, but increasingly as they grow older their play tends toward "boys' games" and "girls' games", and increasingly the boys refuse to play with the girls.\* "Girls play with boys until they are seven or eight, but not after that. Even up to that time girls are meek and docile, and the boys are rougher. They don't get together often, as they don't share the same play interests." <sup>x</sup> "Girls and boys of the same family are allowed to play together, but somehow the girls

themselves retreat. They are not told to, but it is a question of interests." <sup>Y</sup> Only *D* insisted that boys and girls are not allowed to play together. "Girls must be watched very carefully, and anyway boys don't like girls' games." <sup>D</sup>

There was complete unanimity among the informants on boys' and girls' games, showing that there are no regional variations. "There are girls' games," *F* said, "but not many. Girls are pushed into household duties so soon they lose their childhood." In general, the girls play most with dolls, the boys scorning to join them, except sometimes when there is a "feast," "picnic," or "tazia procession" (a Moslem procession in which symbols of the tombs of ancestors are carried, and which, being witnessed by the general public, is often "played" by Hindu children).<sup>\*</sup> Girls play a game called *kuku* (much like jacks), and they jump rope, two things boys do not do,<sup>\*</sup> "though boys might turn the rope".<sup>A</sup> Both boys and girls play hopscotch and both swing, the boys much less than the girls. (There is undoubtedly some ancient symbolization connected with fertility regarding the swing. "In songs, romances, and mythology, the love-making is always on a swing." <sup>A</sup>) Both boys and girls play hide-and-seek.<sup>\*</sup> "It is a good way for boys and girls to get together, but the girls have to invite the boys. Boys will not invite girls to play." <sup>A</sup> Sometimes the girls fly kites, but it is considered a boys' pastime (probably because it is usually necessary to fly kites in the streets or fields), though "girls like to collect string for their brothers".<sup>D</sup> Girls never play marbles, a popular boys' entertainment.<sup>\*</sup> "It would be considered very immodest, because it is played in the roads." <sup>C</sup> Similarly, the girls never play a game called *dangvoli* <sup>A</sup> or *vitlidandu*, <sup>C</sup> a game played with two sticks. (The writer recalls playing this game with boys, not understanding at the time the shocked remarks of the school ayahs, who did not mind girls playing foreign boys' games like baseball but took great exception to their playing this Indian boys' game.)

Children in the villages have no lack of room for play, and their games require for equipment only the fields, sticks, stones, flowers, etc. <sup>A,F</sup> "It is much more difficult in the cities. There are no flowers or grass, and since girls can't go out in the streets they must just stay in the house and play hide-and-seek." *A* herself was brought up in the compound of Santiniketan (Tagore's school), where the many gardens and verandahs offered

a wonderful playground for the children of the school. *D*, also, was brought up in compounds — hospital compounds — where there was no difficulty in finding playmates or room for play. Her father made a special point of having his children play with children of all castes, even outcaste sweepers, on a basis of equality. But his frequent moves (as a government doctor) interrupted *D*'s childhood friendships, and she did not have the usual play. Her father, to make up for it, used to send the children with nurses or compounders to see the *tazia* processions, fairs, and the religious ceremonies of all faiths. (*D* expressed gratitude that as a result she knew the ceremonies of many groups.) *Z* explained that she was different from most girls in that she played boys' games, "as my own mother always did. We had girls from rural areas at the school, and they wanted more vigorous games than city girls."

Alone among the informants, *G* apparently did not play much with dolls. "We were only girls, and we preferred to play with little toy cars, with beads, and things like that. Anyway, we liked better than anything to read and had many picture books. I had few friends and read all the time or played at dramatics. For one thing, my mother didn't like me to play in Filipino homes, as she considered the Filipinos inferior, though of course I did play with them at school."

All the other informants elaborated on the importance of dolls to Indian girls. But only *C* and *Y* said *some* dolls are "baby dolls", the others making it clear that the dolls in India are not like those in the United States. They are grown-up and like the members of families, or professions.\* "Indian girls don't need to play with baby dolls, because they have live babies to take care of. Dolls are for playing at processions and weddings." <sup>F</sup> "I remember a doll that was a postman." <sup>F</sup> "One cousin-sister had many dolls that were all society ladies. In sending her a doll as a gift I couldn't find a suitable doll in America. They had figures and faces of babies, and she wanted adult dolls." <sup>A</sup> "They are of all ages in a family"—grandmothers, husbands, daughters, etc. Some are village characters, mythological or modern. There are all kinds of musicians, professionals, animals, homes. Some are very costly, some are made of clay and are very cheap." <sup>D</sup> "We played 'house' and 'weddings' all the time. So much so, that one time my cousins and I dressed up and had a real feast for a doll's

wedding. We had bridal processions and everything. We just loved processions of all kinds, though we didn't have funeral processions." <sup>F</sup> "The marriages are played with the minutest detail. Children know absolutely everything that is supposed to take place. It is the same with all kinds of ceremonies." <sup>Z</sup> "Girls particularly like to play at home-making and to have feasts. If there are little boys with them they will cook food and give everything to the boys. But even though boys like to get this food, they won't play with the girls after they are three or four. Girls then play with each other, using a lot of small pottery, dishes, stoves." <sup>C</sup> "We particularly liked to prepare for a play feast, with pebbles, grass, flowers. But we used dolls for marriages and birthday parties. Sometimes dolls from other homes were invited, and sometimes we bought smaller editions of sweetmeats." <sup>A</sup>

The dolls are sometimes bought in the bazaars and are usually made of celluloid, but they are often made at home of cloth or rags. <sup>A, D</sup> "Mothers make them, or some relative. My auntie made very beautiful ones, with sewed faces that were very lifelike. But girls now play less and less with dolls. They have no time now because they go to school. They have no time for making dolls." <sup>D</sup>

<sup>D</sup> gave a significant piece of information in saying that "many grandmothers instruct their granddaughters, with dolls, in all the ceremonies and in all phases of life, like marriage and birth. I don't know just what they do, because my father and mother objected to children being instructed in this way. Father wanted real life, and did let me see eye operations and post-mortem cases, though never birth, and he sent us to see real processions and ceremonies." <sup>D</sup> But few parents are like this father, and life for the majority of Hindu girls is in play. "Much of the culture is transmitted in this way." <sup>B</sup> It seems that most of the play is a faithful reproduction of real life and is not escape or fantasy, except in that it is an escape from the confinement of the home and of childhood. <sup>F</sup> reported that girls like to act out the legendary stories, but even this is not remote from the real life of the home, considering the use made of legends in home life.

Interesting, finally, in this discussion of play, is a statement made by <sup>A</sup>. "Children are supposed to remain their age, though they don't always want to. The child herself, in India, plays 'grownup'. But when the mother plays with the child, she does

so almost as if she were playing with a doll, dressing the child in a sari, with a *kunku*, to be like a bride."

### Religious Duties

Religion, to the Hindu, cannot be separated from social attitudes and acts, and has more to do with prescribed actions and with relationships (to humanity, to the universe) than with belief or faith as the Westerner conceives it. It is, however, symbolized in ritual, and children grow up with this awareness and with participation in the religious life. One finds, as with all peoples, variation in the practice of religion, from virtual non-practice to the most orthodox following. It is a generalization that the more educated practise their religion more in the home, the less educated more in the temple. "It is more a matter of education than class," F said. "Education takes you away from the temple." F "On the whole, most people go to the temple. Sometimes every other day, sometimes every day, sometimes three or four times a day. The going depends on one's will. It is not a social function." C "In the villages everyone goes to the temple, especially girls and women, and especially brides. The non-use of the temple depends on education. It is wholly individual worship at the temple, and not social as here. The social life of the village centres around the tank and the banyan tree, not the temple." A "It is mostly women that go, although uneducated men do, in groups. Going to the temple is not required culturally and religiously. You go when you want to go, and on religious occasions. The temples are open day and night. But more of the religious devotion is done in the home, in the little niche known as the *pūja* room. If the family is wealthy, it is a separate room, with silver or ivory idols. The women do *pūja* there, lighting camphor in front of the idols. They do it because they want to." X "Families in the upper classes, with the financial ability, very often have a Brahmin priest connected with the household." B We see, thus, a variety of practices, but they are consistent in that the women do most of the family worshipping. Girls, of course, grow up with that expectation.

"Mother doesn't believe in ceremonies, but only in quiet prayer. We did observe some festivals, like *Dipavali* (or *Divali*, the Hindu New Year, a four-day holiday, extremely popular over the whole

of India today). In our family we had no religious expectations. We did not have morning devotions with the women getting up at four, though that is the tradition. This is often done if there are older women in the household, but nowadays the mother has too much to do. In our home, each evening we stood in front of the gods and gave prayers and bowed down to every older person in the family. Mothers teach the children thus ; in general it is their province. Through learning many religious poems and rhymes by heart and through doing these things the children learn religion and respect for older people." <sup>C</sup> C went on to describe other religious acts. "We wash the feet of travellers, too, and bow down to older people that come to the house. Especially the daughter-in-law does it. We learn the *namaskaram* (hands together below the chin, head slightly bowed) and to put our hands on the feet of those we respect. Then, too, if there are older women in the household, they make every day the *rangoli* (floral designs on the floor): It is very auspicious." X mentioned these same designs, and the writer has seen them many times, among the villages in the South often being traced on carefully swept ground in front of the house, the designs symmetrically floral, made with lime powder and decorated with fresh pumpkin blossoms.

"Religious duties are still very important, especially the daily reading of the Gita (devotional portion of the *Bhagavad Gita*). We had worship every morning. Mother had a silver frame of Sarasvati ; she lit three oil lamps in front of it and read the Gita every morning. The rest of the family need not be there, and my mother and father did this separately. All children are taught to pray when going to bed or early in the morning. This is an individual responsibility, and therefore unusual for India. Many women, especially the older ones, count beads. There are one hundred and eight on a cord, and one word is said for each one. There is a great variation in the words, but they are usually the names for God. Older people do it all the time. My parents did not do it, since we were reformers, but my father's family, which is very orthodox, did it." <sup>F</sup> Other informants mentioned the counting of beads, <sup>C,D</sup> and indeed it is a common sight to see older women in the villages doing it.

D grew up in a very religious home, the religion under the guidance of her father, who did not teach them that Hinduism is the best or only true religion. "My father always insisted that all

religions have basic unity. In the evening people of all faiths used to collect in our home. Father believed in religion, but not in an orthodox way. He was a great lover of Gita, and we were all taught Gita in our childhood. During the month of *Shaman*, a Brahmin used to come and read the *B'agavad Gita* for seven days. Also we used to hear sacred books when mother read them in the prayer room." D also made the point that children are expected to listen to these readings and to stories, and that girls are sometimes allowed to participate in the home ceremonies, although this is not orthodox.

Religion is often defined, in a broad sense, as the "individual's relationship to the universe". This certainly could be applied to practised Hinduism, with its emphasis on relationships. It is very striking that there is no ancestor-worship, as in China, and that Hinduism, for all its emphasis on tradition and the past, for all its inclusion of the continuity of life and of infinity, influences the individual's temporal life. Each person will live and die; how he lives is his job. Final salvation, release from the wheel of life, comes from individual self-realization. The self, according to the theory of incarnation, is eternal and will reincarnate through a series of earthly lives, each of which is conditioned by the previous one. It was the definite opinion of the informants, however, that only the rare person thinks in terms of incarnation. "People only think of the things they are supposed to do in this life." \*

### Legends, Stories

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of legend in the lives of Hindus. Religion, history, legend, myth, real life — all are intermingled. Whether this importance will continue or not is uncertain, for the chief agents of transmission, the older women in the home, often do not exist in the modern, smaller family unit. The second most important agent has been the *Ram'leela* (stories of Rama), the annual dramatic presentation of the *Ramayana* stories of Rama and Sita, played by professional travelling troupes in all major cities and villages. "We used to go all the time. Servants took us if members of the family couldn't. But now many cities don't keep even the compounds for them," F said. "We learned stories from our old cook (a man), who also

told us many stories of his village. He was the only one who knew them, as my mother had lost her mother when quite young and married at fifteen. There were no older women in the household. We weren't allowed to go to the *Ramleela*, because of economic prohibition. But we read them, saw them in movies, studied them in school, and acted them at home." <sup>F</sup> "All the stories are acted in schools, and everyone knows them." <sup>X</sup>

"Everyone now knows these stories," *D* said, "but the children are not getting too much. There are no older women in the home, and the children do not go to the *Ramleela* too much any more. The families are smaller, and there are not enough people to take them. They couldn't go without grown-up people — they might get crushed or lost. Also, many go to the cinema instead. So the stories are becoming less common." *C*, too, said that the "legends and stories don't come through now." *G*, for instance, learned none from her mother, who didn't know them, but, learned them from her sister, who had read them. It would seem reasonable that this newer form of communication, the written story, might take the place of the human storyteller, but so far it has not done so enough. It is *D*'s hope that adult education will do something about this. Further, it may be that the cinema, very popular in India, will take the place of the storyteller and the *Ramleela*. Movies do deal with many legendary stories now, but there is an increasing emphasis on a new form of "romance". (According to *C*, most of the films are still about the old legends but they are long, dull, and repetitive. "Most people don't want to spend many hours in the evening seeing Rama and Sita." She went on to comment on some of the modern films. One, beautifully filmed and acted, was a commercial failure, since the theme dealt with an unmarried mother. "This simply is not a problem in India, so people did not go to the film. On the other hand, there was one telling about the very young wife of a very old husband. People went in crowds all over India, because that is a very common thing.")

Professional dance troupes make great use of legend, dancing the stories of Sita, Savitri, etc., and though they are not seen by the bulk of the people they are important carriers of legend.

The continual and unvaried reference to Sita as the "ideal woman" is striking. According to *Z*, "Sita is very real to an Indian child and is not just a legendary figure. There is absolute

identification with Sita. Children learn all the old Hindu tales, which have moral value, before they are seven or eight, and especially the story of Sita. They learn them from all women, but also from the old men in the village. Even from the chapati-cookers on the streets, who tell stories as they cook chapatis. But the stories are learned especially in family life. A grandmother will put her hands on a girl's shoulder and say, 'God bless you and may you be another Sita'. And when children are growing up, if they are too shy and introverted, they are told heroic tales of heroes and fighters. Especially girls, though, are taught obedience, duty, and service through Sita. 'She did as Rama told'." One concludes, in fact, that the ideal of the faithful wife who suffered the hardships of the jungle, of capture, of trial by fire of banishment by her husband, and of social ostracism, is the chief identification in the Hindu girl's life. Complete chastity, fidelity, and obedience, with the patient acceptance of the fact that the group is more important than the individual, present the idealized woman. She does not complain ; she only lives virtuously in her feminine role.

Other legendary characters of importance are Savitri, who by her devotion persuaded Death to give her husband back ; Parvati, who having vowed to marry no one but Siva, though he did not want to get married, left her home and went into the jungles to fulfil her vow ; and Draupadi, who married the five Pandava brothers, since it was her fate. Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, is honoured for her worship of her husband, which brought wealth and prosperity to the home. It is notable that Lakshmi and Sita are popular girls' names.

It is impossible to separate these stories from religious devotions. They are read along with the Gita, and given as models for present living, " though less regularly now ". <sup>D</sup> According to *D*, the story of Savitri is sometimes included in religious worship once or twice a month, or at least once a year, the moral being made that by spiritual force Savitri was able to get her husband back. The story of Parvati is often worshipped one month a year ; especially after a girl has reached puberty, and is chiefly for her benefit. *D* commented that the morals from the stories are used as people want to use them. They use the ideas of constancy and devotion to one man but not the idea that women can choose their own mates, as both Savitri and Parvati did. " The actual practice

and worship differ.”<sup>D</sup> She went on to comment on celibacy in the Parvati story. “This is what people believe in. They believe in the philosophy of reproduction only for procreation, but they can’t live up to it. It is the philosophy of *tapaswi*—nothing for pleasure, everything for function. But they can’t do it.”

Stories, then, are for the children the chief means of learning the old legends. “When stories are repeated the children must assemble and listen”<sup>D</sup> but apparently it is no hardship, for the children love stories.\* To a much lesser extent the legends are connected with nursery rhymes and with song. Only *D* knew of nursery rhymes. “There are some, for waking up little children, called *bhatis*. Very few know them. They have to do with Rama’s and Krishna’s childhood.”<sup>D</sup> “Most girls do something with singing and dancing. Good families always spend some money on girls for these things, whether they pick them up or not. Many songs are connected with marriage, with the birth of children, and with festivals.”<sup>D</sup>

We see Hindu girls, then, growing up with strongly maintained family relationships and customs. There is little doubt that they grow up with the feeling that as females they are less fortunate and less exalted than males. It would be incorrect to assume, however, that this fact makes them unhappy. They learn their function, their power, and learn to feel their importance in the home as transmitters of the cultural heritage and as potential creators of a new family group. Furthermore, they do not face agonizing decisions in their daily lives. The pattern is there, and all they have to do is fit into it. To do otherwise is virtually unknown. As children they have little responsibility, little sorrow, unless the family is very poor, “in which case all suffer”.<sup>C</sup> Above all, they grow up with a stable sense of security in their family groups.

## *Puberty*

THE PURPOSE OF this chapter is to describe the traditional relationship of puberty to marriage, sex education and the physical experience, the social and psychological experience, and submissiveness and resignation. Girls mature at any age from nine to fourteen, eleven being an average.

### **The Traditional Relationship of Puberty to Marriage**

Before discussing the experiences of puberty with Hindu girls, it is necessary to understand the relationship of puberty to marriage, for this relationship shows that the maturation of girls is taken as the real and not the potential beginning of womanhood. In this connection we offer information given by C in a paper on "Adolescence in India".

Indeed the good and the bad are interwoven in the Indian philosophy of life. People are somewhat more religious than scientific. Indian philosophers since early times have been conscious of the importance of this particular period in the growth of a child, a period in which the child has to undergo great physical and mental changes. They were not, however, looking at that period, the period of adolescence, from a psychological point of view. They were keeping the child away from that experience and knowledge which he required most on entering adolescence.

Largely because of religious influence, people in India looked down upon sex. They never tried to give sex education to the

adolescents. They were, however, conscious of the changing capacities and abilities of children during this period. They knew that an outstanding characteristic of adolescent boys and girls is their spontaneous joy in mental activity. They realized that the adolescent's knowledge and experience were growing and "the main business of the adolescent is to stop being one". Accordingly, the ancient philosophers advocated a change in the treatment to be given to the boy or girl on reaching adolescence. One of the Hindu scriptures, for example, prescribes this maxim to be followed in dealing with the adolescent son : "When the boy becomes sixteen years old the father should treat him as a friend". This may be said to represent the traditional concept about dealing with adolescent boys.

During the Vedic period (down to the third or fourth century B.C.), girls used to get married at a fairly advanced age. The precise age was not fixed, but we learn from the scriptures that the girls used to get married at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Thus the girl was fully mature and grown up at the time of her marriage. The age of marriage was lowered during subsequent periods. From about 400 B.C. to 100 A.D. the girls used to be married at the age of puberty. Some philosophers of this period were prepared to recommend marriage only a few months after puberty. (The girl at that age was supposed to reproduce, and continuity of family was a religious duty.) In the period 500 A.D. to 1000 A.D. the writers of the religious commentaries began to encourage pre-puberty marriage, but it was not very popular. The popularity of early marriage began to increase in the medieval period. It became so ridiculous that in the course of time the advocates of pre-puberty marriages did not remain content with the marriageable age of eight or nine, but they recommended that a girl should be married at any time after the age of four. (Invasions of all kinds hastened child marriage, as few invaders violated or captured married girls.) Since then pre-puberty marriages became the order of the day. At the beginning of British rule, eight or nine was the usual marriageable age of girls. In 1929 the Child Marriage Prevention Act (popularly known as the Sarda Act) laid down eighteen and fourteen as the minimum legal age of marriage for boys and girls respectively. At present the pre-puberty marriages are completely out of practice.

Thus, for a long period after the early Vedic times the girls, and also boys, in India used to be married when they reached adolescence. The dominant influence of religion prevented scientific thought during this period. The education provided for children in this period did not satisfy their psychological needs. Though the girls and boys pass through the same changes of mind, our society expects more from girls than from boys.

Child-marriage is thus now illegal, and girls marry when "mature," this maturity referring to the physical fact more than to psychological adulthood. Education, more than anything else, is advancing the girls' marriage age.

### The Physical Experience, Sex Education

"My family told me nothing about menstruation. You learn about it when you get it." This statement, in essence, is what each informant gave, each insisting that this complete lack of sex education is wrong and harmful.\* The experience of the onset of puberty is so vital in the development of the feminine role that informants' descriptions are given here without condensation.

"Brutally it happened to me, at ten," *B* said. (*B* — wealthy, progressive.) "I did not know what was wrong and hid the clothes in a trunk. A nun found them (*B* went to a convent), and I suffered a great deal. Then I was transferred to the older girls' dormitory, although socially I was not ready for it. There was much hush-hush about this division of big girls and small. Small girls wanted to know what made big girls, but there was no answer. Yes, of course there was great curiosity. But we knew nothing until we menstruated, and not much then. The process was not linked with procreation, and we were told 'bad blood' must be got rid of. We had no idea ovaries existed. We knew something about procreation, of course, but only in a vague way. I remember some of us girls discussing how the penis could penetrate the vagina. One girl, who had seen a distended penis (when shopping in the bazaar) asked the rest of us about it. None of us knew, so I asked my father, who told me to bring questions to him, as my mother was dead and my grandmother too orthodox to mention sex. He showed me diagrams and explained in a scientific manner, also about menstruation. That was my first sex lesson. But when I passed on this information at school I was whacked for it, and the girls then took the attitude that what I knew was very evil. Most girls grow to eighteen without any sex education, although there are a few rare families who explain things before then. Girls know, of course, that male and female bodies differ. Boys and girls are fairly free with each other until twelve, though without physical contact. But a girl never sees a grown man naked until she marries. She often even thinks that

physical touch will make her conceive. On the other hand, girls know a good deal about their own bodies. They are more free with each other than here, see each other bathe, handle each other's sex organs." (This is in great contrast to information given by the other informants.)

Y reported that she had no previous information about menstruation, but admitted that her mother was away. At that time she received no information about procreation, no information about the biological aspects of men or women. "My family told me nothing," G said. "I learned about sexual intercourse at nineteen when I was getting my M.A.—learning through books. I was mostly interested in philosophy, and these things hadn't mattered. The first time I saw a penis was when I saw my sister's baby, and even then I didn't know what it was for. Yes, I had seen art pictures and statues, but I wasn't interested in art. I had never thought about sex organs. Mother had never allowed sex to be mentioned. We were told nothing about the female body. I learned about menstruation from my auntie, and from the fact that my mother often had too much bleeding and I had to go for the doctor. As for anything about men, I found out nothing until I was nineteen, and then only from books." (The lack of curiosity here seems as important as the lack of knowledge.)

"We were never allowed to ask about sex," C said. "We were told nothing about the male or female bodies, but one can observe a good deal. Most girls know something about menarche before reaching it, although they are not told until then. For one thing, they have observed their mothers sitting apart at meals for three days each month. So when a girl starts to menstruate it seems a normal thing. She does not understand that it is part of the reproductive system, of procreation. It is just something that happens to women. She is told nothing about marriage, either then or later. Mothers are supposed to tell their daughters about marriage, but none do."

"I knew nothing about menstruation until it happened," F (the nurse) said, "although I had been curious. I had noticed that a friend who stayed with us didn't go to school for four days every month, and she slept on the floor, not on the cot, although she seemed sick. My mother told me nothing. We knew nothing about marriage, or about male bodies, although we saw them in small children. Menstruation was explained to me as from the

Vedas, from the Chandiyok subdivision, in the verses about men and women. Women are likened to a field, men to the farmer who puts his seed into the woman. That's the way things are created, the way life is perpetuated. Menstruation occurs because there is fertilization. For fertilization both seed and fields have to be fertile in order to produce anything perfect. However, in all cultures girls and women refer to menstruation as a 'curse'. We call it 'our guests', because guests are not welcome in India. Guests land on people and stay, and the host must receive them. He must just endure it, as a necessary evil. In India we don't know how to be guests, only hosts." (This is consistent with Hindu laws on hospitality.)

"A girl learns about menstruation when she gets it," A said. "It is the cause of many breakdowns. It is similar with marriage, neither one knowing about it. A girl is told nothing at all about the body, male or female. She is mortally afraid of marriage. Girls do talk about their menstruating experiences, but they never learn about marriage, because no married woman will mention the subject to an unmarried one."

Z reported having cried when she began to menstruate, feeling that she ought to have been told what was going to happen. "We didn't even know the correct words to use. But now it is much more common to tell the girls. They are told nothing about bodies, however, except that they must be kept pure for man. This is the Indian ideal of womanhood — a woman is meant to be only one person's consort, and all her time and devotion are to be spent for that one man, after her parents. We haven't really got away from this ideal today. We are told nothing about men physically, but only that we must respect them. They are gods to women. Girls go right up to marriage knowing nothing of its meaning, but in some educated families, just before marriage, girls are told something by an auntie."

"Girls know nothing about these things," D reported, "or at least I didn't. (D's father was a doctor.) Many knew much more than I knew. They must be learning somewhere. But no one knows that menstruation has anything to do with reproduction. They only know that they must sit apart from others at meals, that they shouldn't take exercise, jump about, eat cold things or pickles, that they must rest more. These things are more rigidly observed when older women are in the house, but nowadays girls

are ashamed to observe these things."

Thus we see that the whole family does recognize the fact of menstruation, even though its physical basis isn't explained. "When girls menstruate they often come home (if in boarding school). Brothers often say, 'Menstruate more often and come home more often'. They would say this only in private to the sister, however — never in front of the family." <sup>F</sup> "I can discuss sex education with my sister, though not at all with my mother. I can discuss anything with my mother except sex." <sup>Y</sup> "We weren't told anything, but we knew a good deal." <sup>X</sup>

<sup>F</sup> offered an explanation for the lack of special sex education that seems an important part of the Hindu view toward life and nature. "Life is seen as a whole and as natural. One does not teach about life and the natural things. Sex is considered natural. Masturbation, menstruation, and all aspects of sex are taken for granted."

It seems clear from the above information that in general the process of menstruation is shrouded in a good deal of mystery and ignorance, and that it is usually a shock to the girl. <sup>C</sup> and <sup>Z</sup> felt that girls accept it as a normal thing; the others thought it is a hard experience. All agreed that the physical aspect of menstruation is always unpleasant. "One month, one sari," <sup>D</sup> reported, explaining that they carefully keep old white muslin saris, tearing them up for use. She shuddered at the suggestion that many girls and women have to wash these rags (as <sup>F</sup> reported) and commented that she had no idea what the poor people do. (The poor are lucky to have one sari a year.) "It must be very difficult." <sup>D</sup>

It seems strange that there is virtually no ceremonial recognition of a girl's coming of age. <sup>C</sup> said there is sometimes a very small celebration. <sup>Y</sup> said she had been surprised, when living temporarily in the South, to learn that girls are given feasts on this occasion, and that they are dressed like brides. <sup>X</sup>, from the South, said it isn't done much any more, even in the South. <sup>D</sup> related the celebration to marriage. "I have heard that before, when girls married in childhood, parents celebrated their menstruation. But this is no more." It seems reasonable to assume that the former early marriage custom, with puberty marking only the possibility of consummation, accounts for the lack of important ceremony.

C, in her paper on "Adolescence in India," specifically discussed sex curiosity :

Boys and girls in India have only rare opportunities of social intercourse through parties, etc., because it is not customary. The absence of opportunities to talk freely and to know each other adds to the curiosity which they feel about each other. Our society insists on modesty especially among girls, and modesty is commonly interpreted to mean want of any relationship with boys. Sometimes this leads to emotional starvation ; sometimes, though not often, it leads to resorting to secret ways of satisfying sex curiosity. Under such great social pressure, the adolescents in India cannot develop a healthy attitude towards sex. Few girls know anything about sex life before they get married. Girls get married, at least nowadays, in late adolescence. Sometimes they get married before they are psychologically prepared for it. Any open conversation about the sex topic is deliberately avoided, because it is considered to be against the accepted norms of adolescent behaviour. Because of this unhealthy attitude about sex, girls sometimes cannot enjoy sex life even after marriage. Boys, though relatively more free than girls, still do not have enough knowledge about sex in the scientific sense. Neither the home nor the school provides any information on this important subject. The boys generally get married after they finish their education, when they have crossed the period of adolescence. Premarital intercourse is very rare in India. Due to the strict attitude of our society on this matter there is no sex outlet except masturbation. (C made it very clear that she was referring to boys. The writer has been unable to find any knowledge of girls masturbating or indulging in homosexual practices. It is not, for instance, a problem in boarding schools. On reflection, this seems consistent with other factors.)

It is the experience of the writer, and attested to by the informants, that in the villages there is a greater knowledge of sex. Poverty demands more nudity and less privacy. Furthermore the breeding of cattle, dogs, and other animals becomes common knowledge to the children. The peasant farmers themselves, like those in all cultures, indulge in earthy humour. It is significant, too, that profanity is coarsely sexual, having little of the connotation of mere emotional release that is a part of our profanity. At the same time, sex is a taboo, just as in urban life, and children grow up with little scientific knowledge of the body or its functions. These things are not talked about. (The extreme reticence

of Indian servants to discuss sex matters has always been noticed by Westerners in India. The servants are willing, and indeed eager, to discuss almost any other aspect of personal lives.) Moreover, propriety is strictly observed in villages, and the men of a village rather fiercely protect the honour of their women, not trusting their women to do so themselves. One incident well illustrates this. The writer was camping at the edge of a wooded area near a Hindu village. One afternoon one of the camping party's servants ran through camp, in obvious terror, striking out for home ten miles distant, despite the approaching dusk. Angry villagers, who had been cutting wood, then appeared, brandishing their curved knives. The other servants, who had not tried to protect their fellow, finally and reluctantly gave the information that this man was observed making advances to a village woman who was gathering wood. They would not define "advances," seeing little difference between intention and act, and admitted the woman had been responsive. It seemed to them highly reasonable that the village men should be very angry, and they thought the flight was entirely prudent, murder being wholly possible. On the other hand, they had no blame for the culprit, who was the victim of a "bad wife".

### The Social Experience

"Puberty is the termination of childhood," *F* explained. "A girl is then suddenly shoved into adulthood, without much adolescence. She may have the turmoils of adolescence, but everyone takes it for granted. She will get out of it, but at a tremendous cost." *C* also commented on the fact that girls are pushed into adulthood from this point, "mostly because girls must help their mothers except in aristocratic families. They are very free up to seven or eight, boys and girls being treated alike. But after that, and especially after menarche, girls are pushed much faster." "Puberty forces girls to grow up fast." <sup>x</sup> *Y* agreed, but added, "But although it is recognized that she is now grown up she isn't entirely made to give up all childish things. My brother used to call me *Jangli* (a girl who lives in the jungles). I didn't like it and told my mother, who called my brother and said, 'You must respect her even if she is younger than you.'" "Once a girl is thirteen," *A* said, "she is pushed into adulthood. She is permitted

no tantrums, wears saris, learns real cooking, must mind the children, and is generally scolded more." Z was the only one to say that girls are not consciously forced into adulthood. "It is all very natural. At menarche a girl feels she must keep away from boys. She now thinks she is mature and will marry soon, unless she goes to school, and if so she takes it in her stride."

As has been seen from comments above, menstruating girls and women are expected to be segregated. (There are many laws about this in ancient Hindu Law codes.) D gave the older, more strict interpretation of this segregation. "In the home, menstruating girls and women mustn't enter the kitchen, touch any eating or cooking things, eat with the others, touch the clothes of anyone, be touched by anyone, or sleep in the same room with their husbands for three days. After the three days they wash their hair and change clothes, and then they may touch things and be touched by others. This isn't done nowadays so strictly, but at least they cannot eat with the others or take part in the ceremonies." "Segregation is still very common, except with very modern families," C commented, "and the menstruating mother does not cook. She generally eats with the family, but sitting apart from them. She does get a feeling of being unclean, but the three days' rest is very good for her — and is the only rest she gets in the month. Many husbands, unwilling to do any cooking, must do so when their wives are resting. It is good for menstruating girls to have three days' rest, also. They eat aside, washing their own dishes. This is the general practice in homes, but not in schools and colleges." "It is a break for women, who otherwise work very hard. That is one reason they don't protest." F B said, "The rules about being unclean during menstruation are observed very strictly in some classes, but even when less strictly observed, in most families the menstruating woman doesn't take part in *pūja* festivities. She will eat with the family but not cohabit with her husband." A said that the segregation is a custom of West India, not of her society (Bengal). "But even with us a menstruating woman cannot attend auspicious ceremonies like cremation or marriage." X, from the South, said, "Segregation is practised by orthodox families. Once I lived for three months with a Brahmin family. When the orthodox people were around we had to observe segregation, avoiding personal contact, sleeping in a separate room. But we did not do it when

they were not around." Y, a Moslem, said, "We can cook and can eat with the family, but cannot join in religious ceremonies. The mouth is clean, but the girl is not clean."

There was general consensus that the beginning of puberty marks the end of short dresses or skirts and blouses, and the beginning of long saris, this change as much as anything else serving to impress the end of childhood and the beginning of womanhood on the girl.\* Usually it is the appearance of the first menarche that marks this change, though X said, "It is common to start wearing the sari when the breasts begin to develop". In some groups this change is rigidly enforced; with others it is not so rigid. G said she was allowed to wear frocks to school after puberty, and C said she used to change to skirt and blouse after school. "Changing to saris is a part of the expectation that girls undergo a thorough change in their total personality. In any country the girls, during the period of adolescence, feel conscious of themselves and feel somewhat awkward because of the change coming over their bodies. In addition to that, the Indian girls feel conscious over the change in their dress. They cannot understand why their mothers insist on the change, and they are often unwilling, at the beginning, to give up what they consider a more convenient dress. Gradually, however, they get used to the change. In fact, they get used to a number of changes in the whole pattern of life." C went on to elaborate on her own experience. "In our province we wear the nine-yard sari. That is a very big change from the skirt and blouse, and it makes us very conscious of our new role. The nine-yard sari is very concealing, and we become conscious of the hiding of our breasts, our mothers teaching us to pull the end of the sari over the breasts. 'The sari kept in front is the sign of a modest woman'." F recalled not being allowed to run around in the house in her slip and blouse, being forced to wear her sari even in privacy. "The sari is the mark of womanhood," A said, "and girls are expected to change to them at this time. But this is not true of all groups, and those in the upper middle class don't always do it. There is no strong stigma against frocks, even at fourteen and sixteen, in the area where I lived."

There is, also, a change in hair style, though with less significance. "There is a tendency to arrange the hair differently, two braids changed to one, or one to a bun. I used to pretend I had

a bun, using a handkerchief." <sup>4</sup> Other informants did not feel "doing the hair up" has anything to do with puberty, but more with position. This writer recalls girls in teacher training — high school graduates in their second year of training — excitedly putting their hair up in buns on their first day as "teachers" (for their week of practice teaching). They were very self-conscious and proud of this symbol of authority, and spent much time that first morning giggling and chattering over the process. It became almost a ritual, older girls going over to the dormitory and "showing them how".

We have discussed the use of cosmetics, which is begun during childhood but which takes on a different character after puberty. A girl then feels more conscious of cosmetics in relationship to womanhood; cosmetics are then not just ornament but have significance as pleasing to men.

There has been no treatment of *purdah* in this study, the practice being nearly non-existent today. However, a little does still exist, and it is with the first menarche that girls begin to observe *purdah* regulations, travelling in closed vehicles or with their faces covered. Y, a Moslem, used to wear her *bourka* (white garment covering the whole body, even the eye-holes screened) to her village, but generally not elsewhere. She did not like to wear the *bourka*, and her elder sister had broken the custom. Her mother did not care whether she wore it or not, but insisted she do so when at home because of the aunts, to whom it was still important. <sup>Y</sup> Y commented that with the partitioning of India and the ensuing riots and migrations, the practice of *purdah* almost dramatically disappeared. "Too fast, really," she said, referring to the difficulty of changing traditions and customs suddenly. *Purdah*, a result of invasions, has always been observed more by Moslems than by Hindus. None of the Hindu informants had practised any form of *purdah*, though all said there is a little left. "We have seen it sometimes." <sup>D</sup>

Puberty brings no major changes in family relationships, and the informants seemed surprised that such could ever happen. But certain changes in emphasis are indicated in their remarks, the bases for these changes being that the girl is now physically mature so that her virginity must be protected and that she must assume more of her womanly duties. The position of the father does not change. He is either warm or distant, according to what-

ever he was previously, and he remains the firm head of the household. He does, however, have to think seriously in terms of finding a suitable husband for his daughter, and most fathers are sad when they lose their daughters to another family.\*

The mother, always close by association to the girl, in a sense becomes more so. All the rules of propriety must be more rigidly enforced after puberty, and it is the mother who carries the chief burden of the enforcement.\* Furthermore, the daughter is generally expected to carry more of the household burden — to “do real cooking,” as *A* said — and the mother is the tutor.\* Finally, the mother has much of the responsibility for protecting the girl’s virtue, and must be “much more careful than before”. “Girls are more restricted in their play with the neighbours, for one thing.”<sup>*D*</sup> “Girls are always supposed to be chaperoned on the streets, but they go sometimes when they are small. Now they really don’t go.”<sup>*F*</sup> “Yes, there is less freedom,” *C* said. “The mother has to be much more careful of outside activities. Girls don’t understand concupiscence.”<sup>*C*</sup> “The family relationships remain the same,” *X* said, “but there is a new awareness for the girl. The stage is set for her marriage. The family has been waiting for this, and the girl is teased by everyone. ‘Now we must find a husband for you.’ The girl experiences shyness, fear, anticipation.”

One sees the basis for the careful protection of girls by society, such as women’s compartments on trains, high walls around schools, night watchmen, strict rules about men visitors, etc. Family and society insist upon these rules, which are generally like those in the college in which the writer taught. Men visitors could come only on Wednesdays and Saturdays, from four to six, going up to the chaperon at the desk and asking to see a girl, then seeing her only on the grounds immediately in view of the chaperon. The college graduates could have any men visitors, but high school graduates could see only those on a list sent by the parents (invariably relatives). Rules such as these were onerous to the faculty members, but were expected by the parents, who otherwise would not send their daughters to school. They were, moreover, perfectly reasonable to the girls.

An Indian man student explained that even in colleges that are co-educational men are often not allowed to talk to the girls. “Of course,” he went on, “that was in the South, and they are much stricter there. South Indian girls have a much harder time

here in America. They are more shocked than the others by dancing, by men touching women. It is true this is difficult for all of us. It was some time before I would dance." Y commented, too, on the strictness of the South, where she went to college for some time. She found that the strictness resulted in evasions, like getting permission to go shopping with the intention of going to the movies (though always with other girls), a practice unacceptable to the Northerners, who promptly got into trouble with their honesty. On the other hand, Y did not go to the Bangalore "Olympics," though she is an excellent athlete, because her parents would not permit this freedom." <sup>Y</sup>

The writer had formerly assumed that Hindu girls and women have a "right" to the protection of society, having witnessed on a number of occasions the social attitude following the entry of a man into a girls' dormitory (which often does result in violation of a girl). The community in no way blamed the girl, who had apparently not resisted, but blamed society for failing in its protection. This interpretation of "having the right to protection," however, is false, as was soon apparent from the puzzled expressions of informants. It is, as the writer now sees, a Western attitude. The informants' explanations all pointed to the ignorance of the girl (who therefore should not be blamed) and to the *duty* of society to protect her. "They don't know what is happening to them." <sup>D</sup> "A girl has no training in protecting herself, and that is why society must be more careful." <sup>F</sup> "Girls don't know about these things." <sup>Z</sup> "Society must protect women and girls, as they don't know how to protect themselves. Rapes do take place (X was very much surprised to hear that girls or women do often protect themselves from rape.) Girls have had sheltered lives, with their brothers protecting them on the streets." <sup>X</sup> "Protection is necessary because all this hush-hush system on sex makes high walls imperative. The one and only relationship with men is marriage. There is no such thing as casual friendship." <sup>B</sup> (College girls asked the writer, in total sincerity, how Western women could "go out" with different men. They listened to explanations of "going out to play tennis, or dance, or swim" with much scepticism, finally conceding that Western women can do these things but that Indian women cannot. "With us it is not a question of going to do something; it is a question of being with a man.")

"Girls can remain just as free with their brothers," *C* said, referring again to family relationship, and then qualified her statement with "although this is not true in the uneducated classes". Others insisted, too, that the companionship and understanding of the brother remains strong, and is in no way changed with puberty, except for the fact that interests diverge more and more.\* "Girls then don't play with their brothers so much, but they do talk with them and take care of them and are protected by them in turn."<sup>D</sup> The idea of companionship remains strong and may even strengthen.\* Incest has consistently been held a great sin in India, and though it has existed in the past and does exist today, it has never been a problem.

### The Psychological Experience

Most of the informants did not see puberty and adolescence as difficult for the Hindu girl, despite the initial shock. *Z*, one of two informants who said even menstruation is not a shock because it is normal and thus accepted, insisted that this period should not be seen as a definite psychological period. "Our girls are not even conscious of what is happening to them. They go through the giggling stage, of course, which in India comes earlier for girls than in the United States." She went on to point out that the restrictions going with the process of maturing are self-imposed, and fully in line with the fact that girls want to be women in the traditional way.<sup>Z</sup> This last thought is compatible with the entire process of identification with the ideal of womanhood which is so apparent, but the former remarks to the effect that the period is not important psychologically are not substantiated by the weight of evidence given to the contrary.

*F* had pointed out the period as the definite end of childhood, girls then being hurried into adulthood rather rapidly. We recall her remark, made in connection with the social experience, that "there are turmoils of adolescence, but everybody takes it for granted. We get out of it, but at a tremendous cost". She went on to mention specific limitations. "Indian girls become acutely aware of the limitations. For instance, that of not touching boys or men, of eating separately when menstruating, not even drinking water from the same place. It gives them a hostile, derogatory feeling. They are, in fact, treated just like the untouchables, and

there is absolutely no sympathy involved in it. No one is sorry for girls."

A had mentioned menstruation experiences as the "cause of many breakdowns". She elaborated further on the feeling of loneliness an adolescent girl feels. "At puberty a girl is really still a child and enjoys child's play. She has not yet reached the age of fifteen or sixteen when she reads novels and enjoys being an older person. At puberty she really has no interests except those which she is now denied. She neither belongs to the younger people (her mother scolds her for even talking like a baby) nor to the adult group. I had that experience myself. The only thing I did about it was to say I wouldn't learn to cook, though I love it now. These things are done mostly with punishments and scoldings. Girls are afraid of their fathers and mothers." X, on the other hand, expressed her opinion that it is not a period of loneliness, "because the other women in the household are still not emotionally mature. There is a greater bond between a girl and the other women after puberty." More evidence, however, points to the prevalence of the former opinion, particularly among the more educated.

There were many comments on the prevailing mood of the adolescent Indian girl. "An Indian girl does a lot of brooding and sulking. Her feelings are *very* easily hurt." <sup>x</sup> "Of all people in the world, Indians are the most easily hurt." <sup>F</sup> A used virtually the same phrase, going on to say, "Indian girls have many quarrels. Not about boys, as you might imagine, but about things in school. It is real personal hurt." X said, "Her wounded feelings are not shown overtly. How can a girl rebel? She has to take it internally. She is hurt especially in her interpersonal relationships, especially at home but also in school." It is a fact that the rivalries and jealousies concerned with relationships to authority become a genuine problem in Indian schools. Girls vie for the honour of carrying teacher's books, for running errands for her, and the teacher who does not confer these favours evenly is in trouble, having brooding, sulking girls watch her with pained expressions. "The trouble is that very often teachers really are partial," Y complained. But then she immediately agreed that this is so in all countries, the possible difference being that in India it is so much more seriously viewed, Indians thinking so much in terms of special and personal relationships. Girls don't speak to each other for long periods, or they sulk because teacher smiled at Lakshmi

one morning. They become absurdly jealous over the beauty of a certain girl (beauty being chiefly the fairness of the skin), that girl being thus accorded the leads in school dramas. They assume injured expressions of martyrdom and purposely show a lack of graciousness (though never disobedience) in doing things. They are, in other words, ingoing in their emotions, rarely giving vent to outward explosions.

### Submissiveness, Resignation

The word "submissive" was not used in any questions, but the informants, of their own accord, discussed the subject. They had come to think that Indian women are submissive (a fact they had not realized in India), and that this submissiveness owes much to the experience of adolescence.\* *B* and *D* said there is little rebellion in later years because it has all been worked out long before. Adolescence, of course, has its problems in any culture, but it is significant to this study that its chief characteristic as regards Indian girls is private hurt and suffering, with virtually none of the "storm and stress" that is so characteristic of American adolescents. This is no doubt partly because of the Indian cultural emphasis on self-control and obedience, but seems also related to the fact that the Indian girl doesn't lose or change her relationship to her family. Modern psychological theory holds that "storm and stress" is a function of the difficulty in relating to new groups. The Indian girl experiences no ambiguity in her role as family member. She has no reason to rebel against her parents, and does not need to seek anchorage elsewhere. Furthermore, the family, because of its authority pattern, is a stable and cohesive group. It does not break up, either legally or psychologically, and remains strong and consistent. This in itself gives the girl firm anchorage, and then because of the family autonomy the girl is not burdened with responsibility and with difficult decisions. The pattern is laid for her, and she has no choice. There is even no blame attached to her, should she get into trouble (unless she herself has been "immodest"), for it is the duty of the family to protect her. The responsibility for her development and her future lie with the family and with society.

On the other hand, there is apparently considerable status role ambiguity, the girls living through two or three years when they

are neither children nor adults. This period was functionally provided for with early marriage, when a girl who had reached puberty was married and living with her husband (though possibly ill-prepared to do so), and thus was not lonely and had the status of women. This ambiguity of status is probably a partial explanation for the easily hurt feelings of the adolescent Indian girl. Furthermore, women more than men (and Indian women more than Western women) depend upon personal relationships. They have to, being economically dependent, and their success depends so much more on personal relations than on objective achievement. They thus become very sensitive to any subtleties in their favour or disfavour.

It is now accorded that frustration, even if severe, will not necessarily lead to aggression, studies in some non-Western cultures proving this fact. There are a number of societies in which there is neither open rebellion nor apparent inner conflict. This absence of aggression does not necessarily mean, however, that there is no conflict within, nor that it does not become overt in time of crisis. Indian women were notoriously aggressive during the nationalist movement. But in general it seems that frustration, with Indian girls, leads not to aggression but to autistic regression, repression, and resignation. The more severe the frustration the more likely it is that these defenses will be adopted, one's own repressed hostility becoming, as it were, the supposed hostility of others. In fact, those needs which are in greatest conflict with accepted norms such as hostility in India are the ones usually repressed. They may never come out later on ; they may be sublimated or projected. This type of adjustment is logical in the Hindu cultural pattern, which emphasizes patience, self-control, selflessness, and harmony—not toughness, initiative, individualism, and competition. It is not culturally acceptable to show aggression (except in time of crisis), and therefore the frustration can only point inwards, resulting in resignation and submission. This is the price the Hindu woman pays for her security. The informants had begun to see this "price," but were nearly all of the opinion that the security is worth it.

## *Puberty to Betrothal*

IT WILL BE shown here that girls in this period, roughly up to sixteen or eighteen, continue in their former patterns of training and education but there is increasing emphasis now on their participation in household and religious duties. Considerable attention will be paid to family relationships, especially that of brother and sister, and to the changing family pattern.

### **Continuation of Patterns of Training Education**

As has been noted, it becomes increasingly desirable for girls to continue their schooling until they have Matriculated, but by no means do the majority of Indian girls achieve this goal yet. Many are needed in the home, in the fields, in the factories. Family incomes are totally inadequate in most cases, and much of India operates under an economy of scarcity. Under such conditions there are many families in which each mouth must earn its food. This economic necessity, considering that most schools cost money (for fees, books, bus fares, etc.), and that little of the formal education has value in the practical world, means that large numbers of children (and especially the girls) are not sent to school, particularly to secondary schools. The informants insisted, however, that the picture is changing rapidly, not only because of compulsory education laws and a national interest in education, but also because education increases marriage chances and hence enlists the encouragement and co-operation of the family.

It must be re-emphasized that the entire training of girls is for

preparation for marriage.\* In so far as education aids that, it is approved. There are many girls now preparing for teaching, certification being given after two years of teacher training beyond Matriculation. The informants did not think this trend is an obstacle to marriage, as it has not interfered with marriage. (Marriage, on the other hand, seriously interferes with the teaching profession. Many girls, though fully trained to teach and wanting to teach, have not been permitted to do so.) Increasingly women are continuing to teach after marriage (maternity leaves are granted without question), but they do so only if economic necessity demands it. The duties of home and children are paramount. Higher education does interfere with marriage (this subject will be discussed later) and is not often encouraged. At any rate, despite the new horizons of education and industrial opportunities, marriage is still the only approved course for a girl.

### Household Duties

"The main focus of marriage is motherhood and household duties," *D* said. (This was established in the Hindu story of creation, the woman being created as the Mother and the Goddess of the Hearth.) "This is constantly made clear to girls. They are told that they must learn their duties well, for otherwise they will bring a bad name on the family. If the duties are neglected after they are married the mother-in-law will scold them." <sup>*D*</sup> (Interestingly, *D* denied that girls might be told, "Your husband will be displeased". The emphasis is put on the mother-in-law, whose duty it is to see that her son is provided for properly.) "Girls are expected to help in the household work; it is taken for granted that they will cook, sew, etc." <sup>*A*</sup> And *A*, from Bengal, went on to explain again, as she had previously, that girls don't help with the marketing. "That is a boy's and father's job. They know how to bargain. It is universally known that girls always get cheated. It is not even true that in the case of the common people the woman is taking over the marketing. The wealthier homes have servants, of course, but in the poorer homes the husband or older brother buys the food before going to the office. One wouldn't expect an educated woman to go to the bazaar. That is contradictory. An educated woman just wouldn't do it, except for buying saris." <sup>*A*</sup>

Others, however, said that in their areas women were expected to do much of the marketing.\*

C made a special point, important for those who don't know India. "Home-making and home-management are very difficult in India. Nobody in this country knows that. And especially since the War, with rationing, the work has become very difficult. It is a much bigger job than here." This fact was mentioned by the others, too, and has relevance to the importance of the training of girls in household duties. Household duties are a major portion of a married woman's life, and hence require serious training. It is not only that the average home in India does not have labour-saving devices and many tools of housekeeping; it is also that the foods themselves need much more preparation. Milk must be boiled. Water too should be, though only the educated do so. Fruits and vegetables must be washed and cut up, grains cleaned and winnowed (they are full of stones from the threshing floors), flours and meals and spices freshly ground. Indians use many flours and meals—from wheat, millets, rice, etc. They must be freshly ground as they get wormy very quickly. There is an increasing use of milled flours in cities, but village women still grind their own. Meat is rarely used, but when bought it is a chunk cut off the slaughtered animal, never available as a chop or steak. Chickens and ducks are brought to the kitchen alive. Dried fruits are full of dirt, sticks, and pebbles. Furthermore, there is no such thing as a grocery in the Western sense, except a very few in large cities, patronized only by the wealthy. One goes from bazaar, shop to shop, to buy oil here, ghee there, spices at a third shop, vegetables at a fourth and fifth, lentils at a sixth, etc. It is true that vendors bring many things to the door, but whether the purchase is made at home or in the bazaar, the bargaining is an important function and takes time. Add to the purchase and preparation of food the bringing of water, the collection or purchase of fuel, the sweeping and dusting of the house and yard, the cleaning and polishing of the plates and cooking vessels, the washing and care of the clothes, the care of the oil lamps, and the care of the children—and one sees that the Indian housewife has little time, unless she has help from daughters or other women. C spoke often of the difficulty women have in the smaller family units, where they are often the only ones doing the housework. Some,

in fact, really cannot spare their daughters, even for education.

A characteristic of the kitchens in the better homes, in contrast to those in poorer homes, is their cleanliness. The informants often commented on the dirty kitchens in the West (it is no doubt true that they saw more restaurant kitchens than home kitchens). Their own ideas of cleanliness are rooted in prescribed rules, hygienic reasons behind them, sometimes called "Kitchen Religion". "Kitchen Religion", according to *C* is not strictly observed today, but she insisted that Indian kitchens have remained very clean. "Girls are clean in the beginning, because they observe the practices. They can't eat or prepare food before taking a bath. They wash their hands and feet after going to the latrine; many old women take a complete bath again. The dishwashing is done by special servants or by the girls. There is *much* preparation of food, and the girls' help is needed." <sup>c</sup>

*F*, who learned the stories of the *Ramayana* from their old cook, said, "He was a Brahmin, of course (as cooks are supposed to be), and he wouldn't touch untouchables—though he would touch a dog. After bathing he couldn't touch anybody, even us children. He had special clothes for his cooking, and he drew a line at the front of the kitchen, beyond which no one else could go. He cleaned the kitchen, but not the cooking vessels or eating dishes—they were *juta* (taken out of the mouth). He was given some help in the preparation of vegetables, and when he wasn't cooking he would help with the other housework, having been with us so long he had become modernized." *F* explained that cooks are almost always men, as *D* also did. "It is the custom, and in any case women can't cook when they are menstruating and they have babies. They are too much of a nuisance. People only have women cooks when they can't afford to pay a man cook." <sup>d</sup> "It is strange," *F* mused, "that Indian men in India never touch dishes or clothes (though professional cooks and laundrymen are men) but many do who come over here—and are proud of the fact. They would never do it in India. It is women's work, or servants' work."

*D* explained in detail the rules of "Kitchen Religion", still followed in modified form. "The kitchen must be very clean. It must be swept and washed twice a day, morning and evening. Kitchens are even with the ground, and to be hygienic one must follow the old rules, or raise the floor. The cooks are Brahmins and wear only silk (considered germ-free). They wear these clothes

only in the kitchen, changing when they come out. They must take a bath before coming to cook, must always wash the hands when entering the kitchen. There is a line drawn at the front of the kitchen—no one but the cook can cross. Those who haven't washed the hands must not even handle the food. Some today do not observe these things, but if there is an older woman who is strict about these things, who would not eat the food if it is dirty, people are careful. I have often seen a funny thing. Everyone is careful until such an older person starts to eat, and then they break the rules."

D went on to say that these same rules are supposed to apply to women who do the cooking for the family. "When women go to the latrine they wash their hands with earth and water. Hindu women in kitchens never take the same vessels with water to the latrine (water is used instead of toilet paper) that are used in cooking. Moslems and Christians do (*Y* denied this) and this is the chief reason why Moslems and Hindus can't eat together. I myself am willing to eat with Moslems and Christians, except that when I do I keep thinking of these same vessels used this way and I simply want to vomit. It is very insulting not to eat their food, but I simply cannot do so. Punjabis, too, are much dirtier. Possibly because they have much Moslem influence. Everyone knows Punjabis are dirty people. They used to have community kitchens and ovens, and only recently have they had individual kitchens. Cooking in the community kitchens was more simple but no one kept them as clean as they would their own kitchens."

D enlarged on the difficulty of cooking. "Hindu women really have much trouble cooking. There is a saying that '*rotis* (unleavened cakes of whole wheat flour) break the back,' but the men want them fresh and hot. It is much work if there are no servants. If there are no servants the mother cooks, with her daughters' help. With Hindus it is honourable to cook. The highest and richest people do it. Cooking is honourable, but cleaning is another thing. The cook will never clean the dishes—they are *juta*. Dishes must be scrubbed with earth, and they and the glasses are cleaned by another servant, or by the girls. Sometimes there is a servant just to clean the glasses. A cook is permitted to clean the cooking vessels, but if there is another servant he will leave them. A menstruating woman may not cook or enter the kitchen,

In small families the man will cook rather than have her do so. Modern small families don't always observe this, except that even with them if there is any other woman to do the cooking she will have to do so."

F, from Bombay, described a normal day for a woman in an Indian household. "First the mother gets up and puts water in a huge pot on the stove. While the water is heating she takes her bath and the other members of the household get up. The family has tea and *dhal* (pulse, boiled a long time) or cold *puris* (unleavened wheat cakes) left over from the day before. The mother, having bathed, touches nothing; nobody touches her, and nobody enters the part of the kitchen beyond the mark. This mark is sometimes made with chalk, sometimes with wood, and sometimes it is permanently bricked in. The mother is the only one who goes through all the family religious devotions. The father may, if he has time, but he usually just bows his head. Children nowadays pay no attention to these gods—except at examination time. It is strange, even here I bow my head before examinations.

"The mother then begins to cook, and the other women, before their bath, sweep and damp-dust, picking up the mattresses, bedding, and so on. They then bathe, the mother going on with her cooking. She had probably picked over the grain while the tea was boiling, and now she goes on with the preparation of the meal. We have a lot of *dhal*, cooked like a thick soup, and of course *rotis* and vegetable curries. We were very fond of a soup made with curds.

"Wheat and other grains must be cleaned at home. We take out the rocks, winnow the grain, and so on. It is then weighed and sent to the mills, at least once a week. Not many people in the cities grind their grain at home. Grain is stored for a year, being bought after harvest, and is kept in huge clay jars—five or six feet high—or in thick iron tins. Rice, *dhal*, and wheat are cleaned, then oiled with crude castor oil to keep the insects away. Millet shouldn't be oiled, but kept in sterile cow-dung ashes. It is mixed with the ashes and then a two to three inch layer of ash is put on top. Weekly supplies of these grains are brought up from the storeroom to the kitchen. Wheat, gram, and millet have to be ground. We grind just a little rice, for delicacies.

"The children, after their bath, study until ten, then have a hurried lunch. This is not necessarily served to everyone together,

but it is a full meal. Children are at school by eleven, and the husband is at work. The mother and the other women are at peace. There are the dishes to clean, the kitchen to clean. All this time the washing has been soaking in suds, and there is the washing and the hanging out of the clothes. By then it is mid-afternoon. Women then have two to four hours for shopping, meetings, sewing, or whatever they want to do. They don't have to go shopping every day. Most vegetables, fruits, and so on are brought to the house by vendors, and the husband can get things on the way back from work. The women have afternoon tea together, and then they must prepare for the evening meal. It is customary to have the evening meal at eight-thirty or nine—though before sundown in the monsoon, because of the insects—but with children coming home from school, we found it better to eat at six-thirty. We cleaned up—hands, legs, feet—and ate right away. Then we children helped with the dishes. The whole family goes out and sits in the courtyard, lawn, or terrace. Someone is sure to have a musical instrument and will play. We play and sing together and have a lot of conversation. Children tell all about their studies, every detail, every evening. The whole family wants to know about everything. And then the children have to study. The mother and father read, or listen to the radio, or go visiting, or receive visitors. Often before going to bed at ten we have milk or tea and a cold snack."

C, from Poona, described the woman's day as she knew it. "The mother gets up at six, makes tea for all, and heats water for baths. She sweeps, bathes, and then starts cooking the *dhal*. Her big daughters will help her cut up the vegetables, and daughters—today even sons—prepare the 'table' on the floor. The meal is rice and *dhal* or vegetable curry and chapatis (*rotis*), or rice with curds, and after it the children go to school and the man to work. At one the mother eats, and up to two or three, with her daughters, will be busy with the cleaning. At two-thirty or three many children come home for tiffin; otherwise their food is taken to them. From three-thirty to five there is the cleaning of grains, which is very hard on the eyes, and grains must be taken to the mill to be ground. We used to store grains for a year, but now with rationing this is not legally allowed. At five the woman goes to the bazaar and temple. From seven-thirty to eight she is back, sweeping washing, cooking, buying the fuel, etc. The evening meal is just

like the first one. On Saturdays and Sundays the father invites friends, which makes even more work." <sup>c</sup>

A, from Bengal, described woman's work in a village. "In the villages there are generally two and one-half meals a day. Puffed rice in the morning, rice and *dhal* or fish in the afternoon, and rice and hot vegetables in the evening. A woman gets up early, looks after her child, combs her hair, and bathes. Her devotions follow, either at home or in the temple. She prepares the food, taking it, with her own, to her husband in the fields. In the afternoon there is mat work, the preparation of betel leaf, the drying of foods, the pounding of grains and conversations. The grains are all hand-husked and hand-pounded. This is hard work, but rhythmic work, and the women often sing as they do it. The older boys in Bengal help with the pounding. In the evenings the grandmother reads the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* aloud. Others listen, visit, sew, and talk. There is no such thing as inviting others to meals. People can't afford it, though Bengal is relatively wealthy, with rivers, fish, and trees. People eat much fish, and the head of the fish is a great delicacy. There is almost no meat, except the goats from *puja* sacrifices. Deer is a delicacy, but few have it. On very special occasions there is special food. For instance, on Krishna's birthday, people exchange *bita*, a sweet made from ground rice."

X, with village experience in the South, also emphasized the time consumed in cleaning, husking, and grinding and pounding of grains, though factory-polished rice becomes more and more common. Y, from Punjab, said every home in the villages does its own husking and grinding. "Women get up early in the morning and do it every day." She also described women taking food to their husbands in the fields, saying that most women work in the fields, too, coming back two hours earlier than the men to prepare the evening food. "But work in the fields doesn't prevent a woman from having to do her other work. Cooking, washing, and cleaning take most of her time."

Thus we see that the prevalent poverty greatly influences the lives of women, leaving them with no time of their own, but that in better circumstances, especially if there are several women in the household, they do have some time each day for their own pursuits. However, be she rich or poor, the running of the household is her primary function.

### Religious Duties

Most of the items in this subject have already been discussed, but we emphasize at this point those aspects of religious duties which particularly apply to older girls. Girls, as has been noted, are expected to take the religious duties of the household more seriously as they grow older, daily devotions being largely a woman's function. "Those who can afford it have special *puja* clothes for worship," *D* said, indicating the importance of this daily worship. "Girls from thirteen to fifteen are particularly supposed to know the Parvati story. If there are girls of that age in the household the Parvati story will be worshipped one month each year. The girl gets up at four, bathes, washes her teeth, waters the sacred tree which every Hindu family has (*D* did not know the significance of the tree, saying, "It is just customary"), and reads the Parvati story and then the *Ramayana*. It is to make fixed the tradition of faithful wifehood. Indian families don't see the inconsistencies with present practices—such as women choosing their own husbands. But Indian tradition has always allowed women to rebel in certain ways, as Parvati, in going away to the forest when she defied her father. She was defying her father, which is usually very bad, but she was doing it in a very pure way. She was living in purity." Girls are impressed, too, with the Savitri story of the faithful wife defeating Death in the struggle for her husband's life, and this story is worshipped once or twice a month. "Constancy and devotion to one man—that is what girls learn."<sup>*D*</sup>

In addition to the social-religious festivals, such as *Divali*, the Hindu New Year, in which the women have a large part, there are ceremonies for life events. We have noted the "naming", "first food" and "learning the alphabet" ceremonies. Boys of the upper three castes have the "sacred thread" ceremony, marking the end of childhood, symbolizing being "born again" to a new life. The informants knew of no cases in which girls have had the same ceremony, though *C* said she understood they did in Ajmer. But all of them understood that marriage is considered the same thing for girls (which is, as a matter of fact, the Hindu tradition).\* "Marriage is a girl's second life. Through it she becomes twice-born."<sup>*D*</sup> Just as the boy symbolizes the end of his training and education for adult life, so the girl symbolizes her readiness for marriage

and motherhood. Marriage is undoubtedly the most important ceremony in girls' lives, and girls eagerly learn every detail of the ceremonies. "When a girl attends a marriage and then goes back to school the others learn all the details from her. They never get tired of hearing them again and again." <sup>D</sup> We noted the emphasis on marriage in children's play. The ceremony itself will be treated in a later chapter.

Another important ceremonialized event is death. "Life is seen as a whole—nothing is excluded—and it is all a part of the home life. That is why birth, marriage, and death rites are all conducted in the home. They are all natural, and we would not think of having funerals away from the home." <sup>F</sup> "The women have the responsibility for arranging the feasts and ceremonies for death, but the actual *mantras* and *pujas* are a male function. Women don't even prepare the body for cremation, for death is unclean, and people called *doms* are called in for that." <sup>B</sup> As with most of the ceremonies, *D* had the most complete description. "With death it is as at birth—no outside people can eat in the house for ten days. Up to the tenth day only close relatives come, eating *sathvik* food (pure food), whole *dhal*, and rice. No one can bathe in the house, but only in the river. On the tenth day there is a *hawan* ceremony. Formerly, all relatives, even when in their own homes in other cities, observed these ten days for birth and mourning, with *sathvik* food and everything. But they are not often doing so now." <sup>D</sup>

A dead body cannot be preserved in India, and this ceremonial mourning comes after the immediate cremation. Death, moreover, is not a finality for the soul, for in transmigration the soul moves on to another physical birth, to move up or down in the hierarchical scale, according to the *karma* of the individual. (*Karma*, sometimes called fate, is so only in the sense that it has been built by the individual in acts in previous life.) "Death is a celebration, especially in the case of people who are older, and even if it is a younger person there is much feasting. An old man who dies has left sons and grandsons, so his own death is not bad or sorrowful. The funeral procession is just like that of a marriage, with a band, flowers, and so on. They actually sing songs of marriage, because the soul is going to be wedded to the soul of God—*Atman* with *Paramatman*. To be one with God is the highest desire." <sup>D</sup> Though the funeral is a celebration, the family,

and especially the women, must mourn. "That is the function of the women in the funeral." <sup>D</sup> The wife, if a man has died, is particularly sad. "Every Hindu wife hopes to die before her husband. She does not want to be a widow, and in any case there is still much feeling that the man died because of something she may have done to anger the gods. So when the husband dies and is being carried away, the wife breaks her bangles and throws the pieces on the body. A woman has no need for ornaments once her husband is dead. They were only for him." <sup>D</sup>

"It is the custom, not so much done now, that the wife is not supposed to leave the room where her husband died, for ten days. The room is lighted at night. The woman is not supposed to change her clothes or to bathe in that time. Scriptures are read all the time, relatives coming to listen and weep. There is one scripture, the *Purana*, about death, the soul, and immortality. The oldest son, at the burning, has to light the fire and crack the skull of his father, to let the soul out. The wife weeps and the son shaves his head. Then he goes every day to the place where his father was burned. On the third day the relatives go to pick up the bones, taking food and water to give to charity. This is considered to be the ten days' food of the man who died, given in his name to charity. They throw the bones in the river, especially in the Ganges or the Jumna, but at least in running water. On the thirteenth day the family has thirteen Brahmins in, and the whole house is washed and cleaned. Everything in the kitchen is given to the poor; new vessels are bought. The water pots are cleaned. Then from mourning there is a change to feasting. They have a big community feast, women bringing *pan* (always considered auspicious). The Brahmins are fed, and they are given many gifts in the name of the husband—new clothes, utensils, bed, bedding. These have to be new things; the husband's own things are given to charity. After the thirteenth morning, other people can come to the house, and the widow can go out. Monthly, on the same day, the Brahmins are again fed and again given presents. It is a *hawan* ceremony. The only thing is that this time there must not be thirteen Brahmins, except on the thirteenth day. That would not be good." <sup>D</sup>

In connection with this discussion of death, it is important to repeat that the spirits of the ancestors do not remain "members of the family" in the way that they do in some cultures. They

do not hover around, return, or in any way take part in earthly life, as they have moved on and into another earthly body. This is somewhat a departure from earlier Hinduism, as there used to be a lot of ancestor-worship, the 'manes cult,' but even then the emphasis was on family perpetuity. Today ancestor-worship takes form chiefly in the religious necessity of having offspring. C said that there is a definite day when the family remembers its ancestors. "On that day we give them a symbol of something—our affection to them and our loyalty to the family. The same day signifies the importance of men and women. We give them *arghya* (water on the hand) which shows our respect and love for the ancestors. It is in general to our ancestry, not to any particular ones, because they are having new lives." So there is a strong feeling of the individual's being a part of the infinite, but not of the individual's becoming a part of the infinite by means of one family. He is only a temporal member of the family, the family having an infinity of its own. The past, then, is binding and influencing via human institutions and traditions, not via the spirits of the ancestors. "It is a duality, a person being a member of a family temporarily, and also a part of his own infinite life. In this pantheistic conception, that is why everyone must be kind to everyone else, not only to the members of his own family, because how can one tell whether he has met these people before or will again? We have a saying that when strangers meet and one benefits from the other, the other person must have owed him an unpaid debt from a previous life. I myself don't believe this, and yet it is strange how often I think of it when I do someone a favour or have one done for me. (This is consistent with the theory of the modern Hindu psychologist, Swami Akhilananda, who claims that the human mind brings with it experiences of past existences.) Husbands and wives who love each other very much can only hope to meet again in a future life. All this places, in one sense, a great emphasis on temporal earthly life, and also shows the unimportance of earthly life. Life is generally considered a burden, a necessary evil." <sup>F</sup> A said that when husbands and wives hope to be together after death it is a question of psychology, not of theology. "There is no guarantee." She said, too, that one's mishaps are part of one's *karma*. One has to live a good life in each phase, or reap the punishment. A wife must be a good wife in order to expect to rejoin her husband, and according to *sati* (the philosophy

embracing widow-burning), if she accompanies her husband at the time of his death she will be permitted to rejoin him in a new birth.<sup>4</sup> C spoke in the same vein. "Husband and wife are a union of souls—a permanent union. Such a union can't be discontinued; it is eternal and will always take on rebirth as husband and wife."

In many ceremonies, there is much attention paid to special forms of food. Informants have mentioned the importance of learning all the things that are for this or that type of ceremony. The older women are the reservoirs of this knowledge.\* The most important things to know about ceremonial foods are the three types—*sathvik*, *rajasik*, and *tamsik*, so often mentioned in ancient literature. "Everything is divided into three. With these three types of food go actions, which depend on the kind of food eaten. Food and thoughts have much connection. Every festival has its own type of food. And there is also much fasting. Fasting means not eating during the day, eating *sathvik* food at night. It is especially important not to have onion and garlic on fast days. *Sathvik* foods are the pure foods, the ones that are necessary for keeping life and for keeping the body in good balance. They include fruits, milk, honey, butter, boiled meats, and very simple cooking. Not much spice. *Sathvik* food is today a nuisance, because so many sweets are *sathvik*, being made of honey, and yet sweets are not supposed to be *sathvik*. *Rajasik* foods are those included for the sake of taste—spices, fried things, onions. *Tamsik* foods are stale things—those kept for days together, like wines and anything that has fermentation. Students are supposed to eat only *sathvik* foods. Widows, too, and they especially must not eat *tamsik* foods. *Tamsik* foods, with garlic, meat, and fermented things bring passion. All of this has much to do with thinking. *Rajasik* foods are more passionate than *sathvik*, and *tamsik* is very passionate. People lose their sense of discrimination when they eat *tamsik*, and so *tamsik* should be avoided. (It is fairly general that those peoples influenced by the Hindu religion and culture do not like to lose their relationship to reality. They do not want to be "out".) Certain castes indulge in them, but the high castes are supposed to avoid them. Many things in *rajasik* and *tamsik* depend on use. Some can be used, but excess is bad."<sup>D</sup> D's explanation of the three foods is fairly similar to that of Motwani :

There are three types of foods. The ones that augment vitality, energy, health, cheerfulness, that are delicious, bland, substantial, and agreeable, are of *satvic* type. *Rajasik* type foods are bitter, sour, saline, overhot, pungent, dry, burning. They produce pain and sickness. Foods that are stale, flat, putrid, and decayed are of *tamasic* type. The man who is trying to control his outflowing energies should live on foods of the first kind alone. Foods that keep the body light, the emotions calm, and the thoughts undisturbed, are the best for the man who is trying to tread the path of return and to attain the highest personality. All foods that produce animal energy, create nervous disturbances and hinder higher thinking, should be avoided. When spiritual life and moral activities are the true aims in life, the bodily demands have to be subordinated. The lower satisfactions smother the true joy that comes from self-control.<sup>1</sup>

"Girls have to know about all these foods, but they aren't especially taught. They learn through observation. There is much attention paid to 'special foods', especially *sathvik* foods. *Divali* is a time of many special foods, but they are more of a feast variety."<sup>c</sup> "We always had a special sweet at *Divali*, made of noodles, ghee, and sugar. And for a good omen—before an examination or trip or something—we had *kansar*, made of whole wheat flour and brown sugar and served with plenty of ghee and sugar."

### Family Relationships

It has been pointed out that the family relationships in operation during childhood do not change with puberty, the older girls in no sense changing their anchorage with the family. "Gradually they are, however, given more opportunity to express themselves but this depends, of course, on the home. There is a *shloka* (verse or wise saying indicating religious sanction) in Sanskrit that says, 'Up to a certain age the child should be spoiled; after that it should be spanked, then talked to, and finally treated as a friend'. This last period doesn't depend on age, but on maturity. It comes, roughly, at the end of adolescence, somewhere between school Matriculation and 'Inter'."<sup>F</sup> The general impression given by most of the informants, however, was one of strict obedience up to the time of leaving home.

It has been noted previously that girls may draw closer to their

<sup>1</sup> K. Motwani, *Manu, a Study of Hindu Social Theory* (Madras, Ganesh and Co., 1934), p. 45

mothers, chiefly through increased association in household duties and in status. But the sense of distance generally remains. "We are always afraid of our parents."<sup>c</sup> "Girls are more afraid of their mothers than their fathers. Sons, on the other hand, are much more close to their mothers than their fathers. It is a spiritual closeness. A boy feels secure. It is difficult for him to leave home, and in a joint family, of course, he doesn't have to. But girls are different."<sup>y</sup> "A girl doesn't often identify herself with her mother. Puberty doesn't affect the relationship, except that the mother starts plans for the girl's marriage. It is not a question of strain with the mother. There is an acceptance. But the girl doesn't confide in her much, at least about intimate things."<sup>x</sup> The mother, of course, is still the rather stern guide. Some girls, like *C*, have more respect for their mothers than for their fathers but "this is true only when the father is not such an efficient family head".<sup>c</sup> Some, like *Y*, whose father died when she was young, have a warm feeling and great closeness, though we recall *Y* said she could not discuss sex with her mother. Most girls don't want to leave their mothers when they get married, but this is chiefly because they don't want to leave their secure homes.\* *D*, whose father wanted her to go to medical school, started with this career, but when her father died her mother was lonely and wanted her at home. *D* had been raised to make many of her own decisions, but she went home and stayed with her mother. "She wanted me."<sup>d</sup>

The father retains his authoritative position, this position heightened by his responsibility to marry his daughter to a suitable husband, but is warm or distant according to his previous relationship.\* *D*, who we remember became a vegetarian because her father did, was on friendly terms with her father. "We were allowed to discuss with him. For instance, when he hoped I would take up the study of Sanskrit, I refused, and was honoured in my refusal. This incident did not harm our relationship. I was fond of my father. I liked to do things for him, would wait for him to come to dinner, even though he was very late from the hospital, even though I used to get very hungry."<sup>d</sup> *F*, also very close to her father, said, "We were very near our father. Ideologies made no difference to him. He was always more forgiving, more tolerant."<sup>f</sup> "Fathers and daughters are very close, though sons are usually more afraid of fathers. It may be because mothers discipline girls and fathers boys."<sup>x</sup> *X*, on the other hand, thought close

daughter-father relationships rare. "Mostly fathers are autocratic. Children see them at meals. There is more respect than emotional love as a rule, though there are cases of girl-father attachment, but they are not nearly so prominent as mother-son attachments."<sup>x</sup>

The family relationships are ritualized during the festive four-day *Divali*. "We have a Father's Day, a Husband's Day, and a Brother's Day in *Divali*. On that day we give massage, a bath, perfume, and lights in a little circle in a dish of oil. It is called *pancharati*. My brother sent me food and an ivory idol of Lakshmi on that day."<sup>c</sup> Of the other informants, only *D* knew of Father's Day and Husband's Day. "On the fourth day of the moon before *Divali* it is Husband's Day — *Karna Chauth*."<sup>d</sup> *G* mentioned "one day for male people. My mother observed this for my father. She just made special food. She didn't believe in any of these things, but did it for my grandmother's sake. My mother was very progressive, like her whole family, and she had been educated abroad. But my father's family was very conservative, and these things were important to them. We had no boys, so we did not observe *Raksha* (Brother's Day)."<sup>g</sup> "There is no day for mothers or sisters."<sup>c</sup>

The most noticeable relationship of this period is that of brother and sister, not changed from childhood's companionship but strengthened and made more important, possibly through the girl's adolescent loneliness. *D*, whose brother was sickly, was an exception. "He was jealous of my favouritism with my father, due in the first place to his inability to study much and to my intense application to learning. We quarrelled very much. But mostly it is not so, and most girls do many things for their brothers. A brother is especially close if he is older than his sister. If she is older there is friction. And there is more friction in the smaller families."<sup>d</sup>

"The brother-sister relationship is very close — almost psychic. We sense each other's loneliness, even when in different countries. At a girl's marriage this parting is especially keen. But brothers and sisters rarely touch each other. The closeness has nothing to do with that."<sup>y</sup> (As was mentioned before, the informants' sensitivity to physical intimacy no doubt stems from their observations in America.) "It is a much closer relationship than I have seen in America," *G* commented. "The sister does everything for

a brother a wife would do, except have physical contact.”<sup>F</sup> “In a sense the brother is the ultimate protector of a girl, even after she is married,” C said. “He is not the only protector, of course, but in a time of crisis he is very important. It depends on the individual relationship. But in all cases the girl expects sympathy and understanding from him. Husbands sometimes side with their mothers.”<sup>C</sup> “He is the ultimate resource, though in some cases the father is, too.”<sup>F</sup>

We have noted the Brother's Day during *Divali*, mentioned by C and the *Raksha* mentioned by G. *Raksha* means protection. (*Rakshavan* or *Rakshabandan* refer to the amulet or to the act of tying the amulet.) There are two different Brother's Days, both of them connected with the *Ramayana* story, dealing with the concept of the danger encountered by going off to war. *Raksha* or *Rakshavan* or *Rakshabandan* is on the fifteenth day (full moon day) of the Hindu fifth month. (*Divali* is at the end of the seventh month and the beginning of the eighth month, Brother's Day being on the last day of *Divali*.) *Rakshavan* marks the beginning of the annual ritualization of the brother-sister bond, referring to the danger of the warrior going away from home. “All Indians celebrate *Rakshabandan*, with the red thread on the brother's wrist. We Sikhs do it. Even the Moslems do it. (Y said they do not.) The sister ties the thread on the right wrist of her brother, wishing him long life.”<sup>D</sup> “The *Raksha* is a token that the sister gives to her brother to protect him. Then he is bound to protect her, and he gives her money. This custom is still observed in most families. In my family we have no boys, but my parents and I send each other *Rakshas* on this day. A *Raksha* can be sent to any man, actually, and it binds him. It often starts with *Raksha* and ends in marriage!”<sup>F</sup>

“During the political movement this idea was used. Women could tie the *Raksha* on to any person of any religion. Only they did not want to be given money. They told the men they wanted only the freedom of India, but they were usually given money anyway. Women went around tying many people — even cabinet ministers. They tied objects, too, like lamp-posts. Of course, all this isn't done any more; it was just during the political movement. But the custom of *Rakshavan* is very common. Our family still does it. No one knows when this thread ceremony started, but it has some connection with Brahmins. Brahmins change their

sacred cords on that day, and they are allowed to tie the *Raksha* also, getting money. Many Brahmins do this. The custom has a historical background, too, because we know it was used in Rajput times. The Rajput women were very proud, and many of them, even princesses, sent the threads to many warriors, getting their help in wars. There is a story about the Moslem invasion of Chittoor (Rajput fortified city, last stronghold of the Hindus against the Moguls). Maharana Pratab never gave in to the Moslems. All the princes and princesses at Chittoor were very proud. One girl was very beautiful, and when a Moslem prince attacked, this girl sent a *Raksha* to Humayun (king of the Moguls), and he respected it. He sent an army to protect her from his own army. It was too late, she had burnt herself, so he gave away some villages to her relatives in memory of her.”<sup>D</sup>

The Brother's Day in *Divali* is a part of the entire *Divali* celebration, which marks the victorious return of the warriors from the wars of Rama against Ravana, the demon God of Ceylon who had captured Sita. “This Brother's Day is considered more important than the *Rakshavan* in much of India, particularly in the North. The sister prays for the long life of her brother, invites him to her house for a feast, then goes to his house for a feast. She puts the red *kunku* mark on his forehead. At any festival the *kunku* is important — as important for men as women. It is auspicious. Sometimes the brother puts one on her, too, but not always. He does always give her money.”<sup>D</sup> “On this day there are two important things. The horse is given prominence, because if it hadn't been for the nice horse the people couldn't have come back from war. Now people often do the same thing with the motor car, putting a garland on it instead of on a horse. It is also the day the brother can take off the *Raksha* thread, because he has come back safely.”<sup>F</sup>

There are many stories and poems in literature, showing the closeness of brother and sister. *F* spoke particularly of a whole book of poems in Gujarati, *Illa Kavyo*, dedicated by the author, C. C. Mehta, to his sister. She is the only sister alive of three, and he pays tribute to her sacrifices for him, recalling their quarrels, play, and reading together. The entire book is about their close relationship. *F*'s translation of the preface of the volume follows.

## ILLA

I am very fond of the name Illa. That name has created and lulled many a storm of pain and pleasure in my life, and with that name are linked many memories. On hearing that name, whatever is evil in me instantaneously becomes good. If that name means so much to me why should I not like it? Of all the names of the Purans — Illa-vrit, Illa-vansh, Illa — the name Illa has always appealed to me; and so, I can hardly contain the joy of celebrating it today.

Illā is not an illusory figure. She is alive. Many personalities weave their way in each human life. Thus Illā is woven in mine. What is more, Illā is not alone. They are three. Two of them left me — to go where? Where I cannot follow them; and yet, by their very absence, they are ever present with me. They are immortal to me. One left me the May of 1926, the other in February of 1931. The third is here to keep alive the small link between the departed ones and me. May God keep that small thread intact and bless my sister Illā with unending "saubhagya." May her contemporaries and elder friends wish her luck. Those who are concerned with my loss may also wish me luck. May God give me strength to keep unbroken my faith in the belief that yet, all of a sudden, assuredly, some Illā will bless me, quiet me, here or there.

The four of us used to play together, roam about together, fight together — but all that is past. Will everybody be interested in what we did and we did not do? Out of those builders of our childhood nest only one is here today and I must be content to recapture their memories through the only Illā left to me.

At dawn, as the sun comes up, she would say, "Bhai, wake up!" At meal times she would save more than half the share for me and even then would wait to eat her own. She would fix the ties and the missing buttons of my jabalo, and shake the dust off my cap. She would clean the stems of my spectacles and if I needed a haircut she would think about it. She would scold me, find fault with me, would tease me, would make me angry, would spank me and seek to make friends with me again. She would be the one to educate me, inspire me. Her early morning greeting would make or mar my day; her blessings were essential to initiate the least of my activities. To her I gave an account of my doings. No lies could I tell her. To her I admitted all my mistakes. Her warmth, affection and blessings kept me on the straight path of duty, within the framework of my limitations. Her single smile was enough to dispel the clouds that envelop life. I could go on — there is so much that I could say about this Illā of mine! Shall I write it all over the sky, using the sea for paint? Or shall I write it with the water spray resulting from the melting Himalayas? Or shall I arrange all the sunbeams in straight lines and create a new script out of the moons? To such an Illā this dedication of poems is very

inadequate. It is a poor echo of the pure selfless love of a sister. For all that I have done to tease her and all the heartbreaks I have caused her, this is but a weak repentance.

If I were a millionaire I would build edifices all over the place and name them Illa. If I were Brahma I would create a new universe and call it Illa. If I were a mountain climber I would look for a magnificent peak and name it Illa Shikher. If I were a great sailor I would seek out a rock and build on it a frail-looking yet strong lighthouse and name it Illa-Divi. Or, if I became a great scientist, I would discover a new ray and call it Illa-Kiran ; or if an astronomer I would find a new Illa-star.

But for the moment I must find content in this dedication.

During the whole of the same month (the Shawan month) in which *Rakshavan* is celebrated, there is an interesting traditional recognition of girls, particularly of girls above the age of puberty, although some smaller girls attend.<sup>D</sup> "The girls do much swinging in this month, and at the end of the month the swings are taken away. (When asked why, *D* said, "Because the rains come," surprised at the question.) There are many songs connected with this swinging — about the separation of wife from husband, who, though far off, will send presents. Nowadays the girls get presents from their mothers, from their relations. Formerly they got presents from even very distant relations, but it is done less and less now. The girls wear green saris, new glass bangles, and go to visit friends, swinging in each other's houses. They get special sweets. The sweets and saris are only for the girls. Saris should be green because that is a festival colour — it symbolizes the greenness after the rains — but now the girls wear all colours."<sup>D</sup> *D* did not know the significance of the activities, recalling only the joy of new clothes, sweets, and swinging. There seems little doubt that the reference is to fertility, linking the fertility of the soil with that of a woman.

Relationships being important in India, it is not surprising that a number of informants spoke about the importance to both men and women of being careful not to criticize each other in front of others. *C*, who worked with maladjusted people in a clinic, told of the complaint of a woman who was having trouble with her husband, the woman saying, "You bad man, you always intentionally insult me in the presence of others". *G* mentioned the special importance of women's not giving opinions contrary to those of men, especially when others can hear. "It is very important

not to shame a man, even if you may be right and he wrong."<sup>9</sup> (And the women are usually content with their private knowledge of being right.) F, too, spoke of the impossibility of an Indian woman's injuring the male ego. "The female ego, however," she added, "is non-existent."

In concluding this discussion of family relationships, especially as related to girls in older adolescence, it seems valuable to include a paper written by C, in which she discusses the old and the new Indian family, and in which we can see the conflict of the older traditions and the newer realities. She describes actual families.

#### INDIAN FAMILY, 1900

It was a well-to-do family living in a large house. There were nine members of the family, the grandfather, father, mother, and six children — three boys and three girls. It was definitely a rich family which could have afforded college educations, but in those days the education of women was rare. No one expected a woman to read or write, and the only thing she was expected to know was house-keeping. The eldest son, twenty-one, was learning in a Vedanta centre. The second child, a girl, at nineteen was a widow, living with her parents. Widows were completely neglected persons in that time. She was very young, and due to her ill luck was completely emotionally starved. She was not even allowed to mix in society and was not allowed to use new saris or ornaments. It was the hard and fast expectation of society about the widow. Her mother was completely conscious of her daughter's plight, and she used to love her most. All the siblings were very much attached to her. The sympathy of the family was her only solace.

The second son was in college, but he was there only because his father wanted him to be — not for the sake of education, but to have a higher qualification for marriage and career.

The father was working at a very good job. But he was not ruler of the house. The grandfather was the ruler. The father was still so obedient that even for the smallest family matter he would not consult his wife but his father.

The mother had no voice. Even if she wanted to have a new sari she had to ask her father-in-law. They had a horse-carriage, but she would never go out or use that carriage as she was the modest and obedient daughter-in-law. The children knew that their mother had no voice, and so whatever they wanted to ask they would go to their grandfather.

The second girl was fifteen. The father thought that it was high time for her marriage. So one day he went out and settled the marriage of his daughter. The daughter, without even knowing the man, had to consent to the match, and after marriage went to her

husband's home. He was ten years older than she, but she had to remain contented in the position. The father was the authority, and so he had every right to decide the fate of every member of the family. This was the practice in the society, and, according to this practice, the girl also accepted her father's choice.

All went well for years. But one day an incident proved that the son could not always accept the dictatorship of the father. The father in our culture is supposed to be the stern man, and so he did not care for the desire of the child, trying to keep his prestige at any cost. The oldest son was completely dominated by his father. As he was the first child in the family, the father was more strict with him in his childhood, and so the son was completely unable to speak even a single word against the father. But the second son was not of this nature. After his graduation from college he went to his father and said, 'I like Shanta very much and I would like to marry with her. I am going to ask her father. I have decided to marry that girl only.' The father was so shocked by his son's behaviour that he did not even understand what his son was saying. The father related all this to the grandfather. Both of them were so enraged that they drove the boy out of the house and told him that he would not get his share of the property.

All the atmosphere in the house was horrified by this incident. That rebellious attitude was completely new to that house. The mother felt sorry, but she was not able to dissuade her husband from taking such a harsh step. She simply saw the matters developing in their own way. The second son used to love her very much, but at the same time he knew that she was completely unable to fight for him or that she would not appreciate his "modern" spirit.

The youngest son, who had by this time become sixteen, was shocked by the incident and the tense atmosphere in the home. He decided not to make any opposition to his father, and to be a 'model child'. So he tried his best. But then he was never free with his father or grandfather. He always used to avoid them and tried to be away from the home atmosphere. He was not an unwanted child. But still he was so much exhausted by the dictatorial attitude of the father and grandfather that he liked to stay away from home. Thus, making an excuse of his studies, he went to the college residency.

The youngest of the girls had no escape. She could not stay away from home. So, like her two elder sisters, she also got married and went to her own home.

#### THE FAMILY IN 1950

Our modern family is a curious mixture of some old concepts and the new individualism of the modern era. The woman is very conscious of her own position and is respected by all. There are still

certain old customs, but the old members of the family are willing to compromise. They can understand their child, and the child can understand the father's character — a mixture of two trends of thought. The modern family is in a transitional period, and so we find certain old concepts still ruling the father-child relationship.

It is a very happy family living in a small town in India. The parents know the importance of the principle of the limitation of the family, and so the family is very small. There are five members in all — two daughters and one son, and the parents. The father is a very kind person, but he himself was brought up under the strict rule of his father, and in a home where the mother had no voice. But he has seen all the miserable depressed life of his mother, and now he is conscious of the woman's position in the house. So in every way he respects his wife and tries to keep her happy. But still he is not able to forget the old concept that the father is the ruler of the house. So he always expects his children to obey him. They may discuss whatever they like with him, but ultimately his decision will be the final one. Similarly, though he respects his wife and expects that his wife may manage the home as she likes it, she must ask him everything she wants to do beyond the household affairs. This contradiction in his own nature is the cause of some conflicts in his home. He knows that he should not make any difference in the education of his daughters and son. But the attitude of society makes him conscious that the education of the daughters is not as important as that of his son. The first daughter is in college. She is an intelligent girl and likes to study. She is conscious of her father's nature and is not sure she will know what to do when he will ask her to marry. But at the same time she has confidence in her father's compromising attitude.

The son is also in college. He is more attached to his mother, as he knows that his mother is not the mixture of two contradictory aspects. He is the only son, and so he is the apple of their eye. But the parents are impartial in the treatment of the daughters and the son, and therefore the daughters are not jealous of him. They also love him, as he is their only brother. The siblings are very free with each other. They are allowed to arrange their programmes, individually or together. The youngest daughter is in school. The children are also very free with their parents, and are able to discuss any problem with them.

But one day an incident proved that the father is very conscious of building the future of his children, still not able to forget his authority. He is prepared for compromise, but is not willing to withdraw his decision. It proved that it is the father-controlled home, with a father in the period of transition between the two trends of thought. The mother knows the nature of her husband ; so to avoid conflicts she asks him each and every thing beyond the household affairs, though she is a capable person. The incident

proved that the family relations are not as democratic as they appeared to be, or as they ought to be.

One day a man came to that house, and while chit-chatting with the father, said, 'Your daughter is a good girl. She will get a good husband if you ask her to marry. I will propose a good person for her. I know him very well, and will introduce him to you.' The father is conscious that before saying anything he must consult his daughter, but at the same time he is thinking, 'I will ask her afterwards. I know she is fully confident in my good intentions.' So he got himself introduced to that person. He introduced him to his daughter, too, but did not tell her anything. Later on, after some days, he called his daughter and asked her, 'Do you remember the person to whom I have introduced you? He is a very good person, and I think he will be a good match for you'. The girl told him, 'I liked that person. But I would like to marry after completing my education.' The man was really a nice one. The father was fully conscious of the test of his daughter. He decided to introduce the man to the family. All the people in the family liked him, but the girl was firm in telling her father that she was not willing to marry before finishing her education. She was not willing to get married immediately. The girl told him, 'I liked the person suggested by you, and so I am not in any way opposing your will. But I am completely determined about one thing, and that is that I will not marry before finishing my education.'

As the father was the mixture of the two spirits, he did not leave the matter entirely to her, and was willing to compromise. So they decided that the girl should marry the man selected by her father, and the father should allow her to marry whenever she liked. So she is now engaged and enjoys the courting period.

Under the old pattern the father would not have been so compromising. This father is neither purely an old father nor a modern one. But he is willing to compromise. He will try to do the things which are not entirely out of the family expectations. He selected a person who was approved by all the members, but still it is true that he does not approve the pure individualism, and sticks to his old concept of the father.

We have now completed the training period of the Hindu girl, and she is ready for betrothal and marriage. That does not mean that she is considered a mature person, but that she is ready for the life of a woman. This should begin before her personality matures, so that it will develop with that of her husband, and so that she can enter the family which will be hers for the rest of her life and in which she will fulfil her own creative function. Her social training has prepared her for that role.

## 6

### *Betrothal*

IT IS SHOWN in this chapter that the tradition of parent-planned marriage persists, not only *despite* modern tendencies but also *because* of the results of modern tendencies. There is increasing "veto power", however, with the boy and girl, and there also is a "courting period". Arrangements and preparation for the marriage are described.

#### Parent-Planned Marriage

Before a girl is betrothed, as we have seen, she is kept strictly, away from men, the only relationship with men that she has learned, aside from those in her family, being the future relationship of a husband.\* A said, "On the street, girls may recognize a male friend (usually a relative) with the *namaskaram*, but they should not speak. (As another Indian woman said, 'To speak to men is to invite them.') The man may speak to her, however, and then a conversation may start. A girl would be considered bold if she began it. This is because girls don't know how to protect themselves, and because when boys and girls get together they are always and inevitably romantic. So they can be together only by gangs. It is really impossible to have a boy-friend, in the Western sense, although some of the college girls are trying. Parents in Calcutta, for instance, are shocked if any boy comes to the home to visit a girl. Of course, this probably wouldn't happen, for a girl has no chance to know a boy. But even if he comes, the father would sit there with them. College boys and

girls, if they know of a couple, expose them to public ridicule, with hearts and plus signs on the blackboard. The boy and girl don't even dare to give each other notes, and notes have to be sent through another person. And the girl can't take the boy home. The only thing she can do is talk about him to her brother." The only satisfactory way to have a boy-friend is through the old ways, which the family approves. \* And that means no contact with men until betrothal, traditionally not until marriage, but it is more and more common for the betrothed couple to see a good deal of each other before marriage. \* "One thing is true, at least, and that is that all girls are sure of a husband. They don't have to worry, and they don't have to seek them." <sup>x</sup> "There is very little rebellion to arranged marriages," Y commented, "especially since girls now don't marry so early. They are older, they have ideas, and they are taken into consideration. My grandmother used to say, 'If you want to find a boy, see how he treats his sisters, his servants'. Both sides do a lot of investigating. And the girl and boy have a chance to see each other, to decide if they want to marry." <sup>y</sup>

"I can say that marriages with the advice and consent of the parents, especially of the father, is still the pattern in my country. From the point of view of the free development of the adolescent's personality, the marriage pattern in India may prove a hindrance. I am inclined to think, however, that the practical advantage of the lessons and knowledge of the parents' experience is more important." <sup>c</sup> C had been thinking deeply on the conflict between individual personality and social harmony, leaning still toward the latter, her observations of American life convincing her that more happiness was possible that way. "We get married very early — I was sixteen — because our development is constantly toward the husband. The wife's personality is developed by the husband. But here (in America) the girls are already developed, and so it is hard for them to adjust." <sup>c</sup> This idea, that a woman is developed by the husband, and with the husband, is deliberately planned, so as to make for lasting harmony and happiness. As many women now are getting more education and are marrying when older, there is a good deal of objection to the fact that their personalities are already fixed and cannot be moulded by a husband. The system ensures, too, that marriage to more than one husband is impossible. \* "It is taken for granted that marriage is lifelong, as with Sita and Rama.

Indian women simply do not imagine marriage except in terms of one mate."<sup>a</sup> (According to ancient Hindu tradition, men can marry more than once, but women cannot.) "Parent-planned marriage is simply accepted; it is the custom of society. Also, among the highly educated, the ones who might object, there is little choice. That is why there is so much advertisement for husbands in the papers."<sup>d</sup> "Parent-planned marriage fits very well. It would be dangerous to start anything else. Where would boys and girls meet each other?"<sup>x</sup> (These comments, it must be remembered, are made by members of the educated, progressive group. Others have not even questioned the system.)

"There are no deviants on this subject, the girl always giving in, because if a girl is separated from home her whole society will look down on her. But generally there is no problem. If children are fully confident that their parents will do everything for their good, then there will be no discussions in the family. Of course all the family members can discuss any problem together when it is of common interest, but if sometimes the father dislikes the man selected by the girl, the discussion about that man will bring out nothing but bitterness in the family. When the daughter is not sure of her choice, and if she has greater confidence in her father's judgment than in her own, she will surely follow the advice of her father. The father has to keep up the confidence in him."<sup>c</sup> "There are very few who rebel, who deviate. Most women are still chained to a system of obedience. Only those with two or more years of college are able to struggle. Others cannot survive independently. In any case, there is the desire for approval, which is strong. It is environmental and unconscious. Women who were married at fifteen or sixteen don't know of anything else. They have no system of values."<sup>x</sup>

"Marriage is parent-planned, yes, but the boy and girl do know each other, even alone, though it's taken for granted they will marry. They are not supposed to change their minds, but if either one takes a definite dislike to the other, they are not forced to marry (a view more progressive than most)."<sup>f</sup> <sup>D</sup>, from a more conservative background, differed on the subject of the couple's seeing each other. "Nowadays families do show the boy and girl to each other, or sometimes just send photos, but if a girl says 'no' it is considered very bold. Even now very few families let them see each other after betrothal."<sup>d</sup> <sup>C</sup> summed up thus: "In

educated families, not even in others, the boy and girl do see each other. The boy has veto power, but not the girl. They can go to picnics, movies, etc., but not alone."

"To have marriages arranged by the parents is the best way. They know every detail, and how can we? Of course a girl should go out with the man and see if she likes him. All my cousins chose their own mates. It is getting common in big cities, but it is not the best idea." <sup>a</sup> (G has lived outside India a lot, is very progressive, and has been engaged both to an Indian and to an American. She is impressed with the unsatisfactoriness of this freedom, however, and approves of parent-planned marriages.) "Even in old India, in the scriptures, girls chose. But parents take pride in doing this. Today they don't want to take the whole responsibility, generally selecting a few boys and letting the girl choose. Boys and girls generally have the same *pros* and *cons* as their parents. They have the same outlook — unless they are in love, and then the matter is out of control. The horoscope is often used, but families rarely go by it. 'First like the girl and then see the horoscope' is a saying. They often close the horoscope if they don't like what it says."

B, the only deviant among the informants and a member of the wealthy "socialite" group, said, "There are sometimes deviants and rebels, who don't want to marry the man chosen by their fathers. I'm afraid they are beaten, no matter how old they are. A girl must give in, unless she is close to majority (eighteen). I myself rebelled and ran away. My brother came after me, since my father was dead. But I didn't go back. I got a job, and I married the man I wanted — only it turned out badly. It is strange, neither I nor my husband, who is an English-trained lawyer, have any belief in the horoscope. But my mother-in-law said long ago that our marriage would not work because our stars were crossed. My husband and I laugh about it, but he has been affected by this. He has several times said, 'If I had only known we would not be compatible'. But I had been a tomboy, and when it comes to marriage a tomboy girl wants to marry for love. She can do one of two things. She can give in and be married to the one chosen for her and submit all her life. Or she can elope and suffer the hue and cry of the police. She is an outcaste until a son is born, but then the reconciliation takes place, for the sake of the grandchild. One of my brothers eloped, too. The C.I.D.

(Criminal Investigation Department) chased them, but my sister-in-law gave them in marriage and hence gave her good name." <sup>B</sup>

"By now we have seen the many frustrations of the marriages that weren't parent-planned. They are among the educated classes, marriages in the uneducated classes, being always parent-planned. I am glad my marriage was planned. (*C* and her husband are an "ideal" couple. *C* is beautifully, securely devoted to her husband, and he to her.) I was married at sixteen. I liked the man suggested by my father, but I was much more attached to my mother than to my father and not prepared to consent to my father's wishes unless I had discussed it with mother. I ran straight home, and when I got my mother's consent I agreed to my father's wishes. I was going from a progressive family into a conservative one, and so I was not sure whether I would be happy in the new atmosphere. But I had full confidence in the judgment of my mother, and my confidence was not misplaced. Now I am a mother, too, and I will also build such a relationship between me and my daughter." <sup>C</sup>

### Arrangements

The horoscope is generally used in the choice of a husband. \* "The husband must always be older, have a higher status, and be on a higher intellectual level." <sup>C</sup> "It could *never* happen that a woman would be older than the man." <sup>A</sup> "I'm told that in South India cousins marry. (This is true, and there are several books devoted to this one subject. "Cousin-marriages are considered preferable. Brother's children and sister's children may marry, but not sister's children and sister's children. I think it has something to do with property." <sup>X</sup>) That simply can't be done in the North. You can't even marry one from the same *gotra* (descendants of the same central figure). You can't marry in the *nath* (clan) which is smaller — it's a caste grouping, but not a family grouping. Of course you should marry in your own caste." <sup>F</sup> "There is much trouble if the marriage isn't with a person in the same caste. But we don't worry about it, for the father will always make the plan, and he wouldn't plan for a man in another caste." <sup>D</sup> "A girl can marry into a higher family, but not into a lower one. Boys can marry into any." <sup>D</sup> (This latter permission no doubt arose as the result of invasions, wars, and the moving of

predominantly male groups into another area. They did marry many women of the conquered groups.)

Girls are often looked over before they are chosen as brides. This is an exciting moment for them — sometimes liked, sometimes disliked. They are on trial.\* “One of the criteria for judging a girl when she is being looked over is whether she ‘goes out’ with others. Besides after she is married if she goes out with others her mother-in-law won’t like it. It’s amazing how many of our marriages are perfect when they have these rules!”<sup>F</sup> The difficulty of finding husbands for ugly, dark-skinned, unvirtuous, or dowry-poor girls is very great. “The girl with the fairest skin in the family has the best marriage chances.”<sup>F</sup> “Girls should be virgins. (Much is said about this in ancient scriptures.) This is very rigorously expected. It is different with the men. A man is supposed to be virgin, too, but no one can tell. In a few educated families there is a medical examination of the girl, but not often. One knows without that. If there is any doubt about the girl, even the slightest suspicion, the man won’t marry her. This has made it almost impossible for nurses (who go to patients at night) and WACI’s (the women in the Indian Army) to get married. But there isn’t much girls can do if they have suspicion about the men. A very courageous girl might do something. But the parents don’t care, really.”<sup>C</sup> “If a girl doesn’t have parents to care for her, or is dark, or has no money, she must accept a widower. Getting married is essential — it is considered better than anything.”<sup>A</sup> One woman, a highly trained and experienced nurse and anaesthetist, was finally forced by her friends and community to marry. She was an orphan and had escaped parental pressure. But the community could not accept her as a decent person, though there had been no criticism of her behaviour. The first choice made for her, by the Indian Christian pastor, was a renowned drunkard who rarely worked; only the intervention of an American doctor prevented this contract. “But he is a man. And she must marry,” was the pastor’s surprised retort on being reproved for his choice.

“We still use the dowry system in my province. It is a terrible thing. A girl has to have a lot of money to get married. If a girl chooses her own mate then there is no dowry, but this is rare. The dowry is a curse.”<sup>G</sup> “The idea of the dowry is still strong, even though customs are changing with modern times. There is

more emphasis on education now. A man wants a wife with some education. But a girl has to have a dowry, because she hasn't any property."<sup>z</sup> "There are two systems of dowry," *D* explained. "In one system the father lets the daughter have as much money as he can, and she may spend it as she likes. In the other, the dowry is used in bidding for the boy, and he uses it. That is better." The dowry, in most cases, is of the second type, becoming the property of the husband's family, and the girl never has any jurisdiction over its use.\* "In some modern families there are love marriages, and then there is no thought of dowry. But it causes many rifts with parents and sometimes causes disinheritance."<sup>y</sup>

"If a girl is betrothed soon after puberty, which is not too common now with girls getting more education, then her marriage is a long time later. But if she is betrothed at about sixteen or seventeen, then her marriage comes quite soon."<sup>c</sup> "Boys and girls are older now, and betrothals come only about five months before marriage. The betrothal is rarely broken. It is a business contract between the families, and the dowry is settled at that time but not given until marriage. There is a small ceremony in each home, with the girls' relatives sending presents to the boy — a ring, sweets, a piece of cloth (a full forty yards), or sometimes a suit. The boy's relatives send the girl a sari, a blouse, or dried fruits. There is no ceremony together, but in each home it is a family gathering, with relatives feasting and worshipping. It is a *hawan* ceremony, with the priest present."<sup>d</sup> Others said there is no ceremony, except *C* who agreed with *D* that "there is a small ceremony in each home".<sup>c</sup>

### Preparation for Marriage

"A girl is told nothing about marriage before it happens. In the nicer homes the mothers are watchful — they try to correct things going wrong, without any overt teaching. But there is really not much they can teach girls they don't learn for themselves in marriage, and the idea is to wait until then. It is not that a girl should always be ignorant of the facts of marriage, but it is tradition that she learns them from her husband."<sup>f</sup> (Really, in fact, to learn them *with* her husband, who is supposed also to be inexperienced.) "My mother never actually taught me anything about the duties of womanhood, and yet I know what is expected

of women.”<sup>y</sup> “A girl is told nothing about marriage. And there are no books around the place. There are English books in the library, of course, but one couldn’t ask for them. Even if a girl had a book I don’t think she would understand the terms. The resignation must be pretty deep for girls to stand getting married with so much ignorance.”<sup>A</sup> “A girl is told nothing about marriage, and therefore it is often a terrible shock to a young girl. She is told nothing about men. No, she is not told that men are brutal or like animals. She simply has no impressions about them. You see, women never talk about sex problems, for they don’t feel there could be any on the woman’s part. A woman is expected always to give physical satisfaction to her husband. If the husband is satisfied, then the relationship is good. The wife, actually, does not always have physical satisfaction, but she is rarely unhappy.”<sup>C</sup>

“There is no advice about marriage given. Girls learn these things from their sisters-in-law and girls of their own age. But older women will not tell about the physical aspect until marriage. Sometimes women on the husband’s side will instruct her on the day before the night of marriage. Other things about marriage girls learn, for women talk about pregnancy and birth. I learned much in the hospital, hearing women talk to my mother. Girls learn, too, from books. When about to be married a girl is given a book. It explains how many days after menstruation she can conceive, what days are for conceiving boys, and things like that. Most boys buy this book about the first day of marriage and marriage relations. There are many things in it a woman should know, and yet few girls in families learn all these things. There is no sex instruction about men. Girls may learn these things from observing animals. They learn, of course, that they are not supposed to touch men, or sit on the same cot — not even with the father. But they don’t learn about sex. They are not taught that men are bad, but just that to touch them is wrong. There are *no* sex relations before marriage. That is *very* bad.”<sup>D</sup>

“A girl is not trained specifically for womanhood,” A said. “It is the whole atmosphere, with no special education. Every girl looks forward to marriage. Her husband is an unknown entity, of course, but she looks forward to her home, to her position. She reads novels and thinks about romance, in terms of *after* marriage, what the husband will talk about, the first night. It is the other way round from America. Marriage comes first, then

romance. Marriage to an Indian girl represents the first time in her life that she'll get recognition as a girl. She will get jewellery and gifts. The romance is there, but after marriage. She imagines what her husband will look like, and enjoys thinking about it. This idea is to me wrong — I think she should know first. But my friends do it, and they are sure marriage will turn out all right. The real problems are lessened that way, but I myself couldn't do it. It is too much of a shock. The man is such a stranger that if he touched you a few days before marriage it would be downright indecent ; yet in a few days you sleep together and he can do anything he wants. Yet most girls really want their parents to choose for them ; they have few chances to meet boys or know them. Student marriages on a basis of equality are not suitable. The husband must be higher trained than the wife. Here is a place where theory and emotions don't go together. (A, engaged to be married to another Hindu student, is working on her Ph.D.) Many know it is right but can't live that way. I have asked my fiance, for instance, what his attitude toward my earning money will be. He does not mind, but he wouldn't like to have me earning money for the household."

"No, there is no sex education for marriage," X said. "The mother may say 'it will pain a lot,' but the first night is a horrible experience for most of our girls. It is a trauma. Women overcome it because most husbands are good lovers. Wives do all kinds of things to rouse their husbands sexually. It tells about this in the *Kama Sutra* (a Hindu classic in the art of love). Women are supposed to rouse the men." (This is consistent with the Hindu philosophical view of the male and female. The male is the passive, the female the active element.)

B discussed the woman's preparation for marriage thus : "As to preparation of the woman in her role of 'wife,' in relation to her husband, she is told *nothing*. She is not told, for instance, how to disrobe, or how the physical penetration takes place. There is no romantic honeymoon, with an emphasis on the new couple's enjoying something special. It is just a physical ordeal. I have seen girls of fifteen and sixteen, after a week of marriage, literally unable to walk. A woman is not prepared for the pain. She is prepared only to submit. She is not prepared to enjoy anything or how to respond. No, she is not told that men are brutal or animal. We don't have brutal fathers or brutal brothers, for instance. But

she is told that girls must win men. It is their job to make the experience satisfying to the men."

"As for the woman's preparation for her role as 'married woman,'" *B* went on, "socially she gets a good deal. She has detailed instructions, for instance, on how to minister to her mother-in-law and to her husband — not in servility, but in affection. Married women never go out unaccompanied. They are never seen out after dusk. They must keep their heads covered. They mustn't be seen conversing with strange men. But they may be obnoxiously free with women. They ask intimate details — the husband's salary, position, number of servants. (These are not considered impolite questions in India.) They talk about sex problems only if they are clinical, and only with married women. They do talk about child-bearing, but they will not talk about the sex propensities of their husbands. Not even co-wives do so. They talk about their husbands only indirectly, never mentioning names, using the third person or 'the father of a son'."

We see, thus, that in betrothal a girl is still enjoying psychological security, the responsibility of choice of husband lying with the family. Modern modifications may increase this sense of security, as with the chance of seeing the man chosen, with veto power, and may decrease it, as with marriages in opposition to the family choice. There is a definite trend, among the educated groups in which there have been some "love-marriages", to hold to parent-planned marriages, time having proven the difficulties of these modern marriages. In any case, betrothal is a formal contract between families, and has little of the element of courtship or of being "in love". And during betrothal there is little physical but much social preparation for marriage. Marriage, like birth, menstruation, and death, is natural and hence does not need to be taught. A girl marries young, developing her personality and her knowledge with her husband.

It is apparent, however, that a betrothed girl faces her one and only "big test", in which she simultaneously loses old security roots, joins a new group, and experiences a new social position. This transfer, however difficult, is made easier for her by the fact that she has no decisions or choices to make, and that her old social orientation — submission — will also be her new one. In other words, whatever is new to her in people and environment, her role is clear and is one in which she has been trained.

## Marriage

WE SHALL DESCRIBE in this chapter the marriage rites, ancient and modern, the relationship of the bride to her new family, the relationship of the wife to her husband, three modern marriages in Vedic ideal, and the fulfilment of womanhood and feminine power. The subject of motherhood, intimate to marriage and womanhood, will be discussed in the following chapter.

### The Marriage Rite

Marriage is not a civil contract ; it is a social-religious rite.\* There are, it is true, an increasing number of civil marriages, with a ceremony that takes about five minutes,<sup>c</sup> but this is because they usually involve a marriage between members of different castes or religions, or families that don't believe in the enormous expenditure of money necessary in the traditional ceremonies, not because the couple does not consider marriage sacred.\*

It is necessary, for a full understanding of the various modern rites and their symbols, to examine first a portion of the ancient rite. The Vedic marriage rite is considered to be among the highest and purest ceremonies and is, according to the *Laws of Manu*, to the woman the equivalent of the Sacred Thread ceremony. It symbolizes the end of training, with a rebirth into a new life. It is the union of man and woman, but less for their individual happiness than for the necessity of joining two family groups and perpetuating the families, the symbol of union being the seven steps around the sacrificial fire or hearth. The

following description is that of Mrs. Das :<sup>1</sup>

The bride and groom were joined in the presence of the entire group before an altar erected in the open. The priest prayed over the maiden and offered her the sacred fire, which she was henceforth to tend. Then he pronounced a benediction over the joined hands of man and maiden. The husband addressed his wife : "I take thy right hand as a pledge for our happiness ; I wish thee to become my wife and to grow old with me ; the gods gave thee to me to rule over our house together. May the head of creation grant us a numerous race ; may Aryaman prolong our life. Enter under happy auspices the conjugal home. May there be happiness in our home for both humans and animals. . . . Come, O desired one, beautiful one with the tender heart, with the charming look, good toward thine husband, kind toward animals, destined to bring forth heroes."

The priest then turned to her assembled people, and pointed to the bride, saying : "Approach her, look at her, wish her well, and return to your own home."

Upon arrival at the husband's house, now the joint home of both, new ceremonies blessed her coming. As she crossed the threshold she was addressed, "Here may delight be thine through wealth and progeny. Give this house thy watchful care. May man and beast increase and prosper. Free from the evil eye, not lacking wedded love, bring good luck even to the four-footed beasts, thou gentle of mind, bright of countenance, bearing heroes, honouring the gods, dispenser of joy. Live with thy husband and in old age mayest thou still rule thy household. Remain here now, never to depart ; enjoy the full measure of thy years playing with sons and grandsons. Be glad of heart within thy home." After the bride had thus been admitted to her new home with so dignified a welcome, the priest blessed the family hearth. "Remain here, do not depart from it, but pass your lives together, happy in your home, playing with your children and grandchildren. . . . O generous Indra, make her fortunate ! May she have a beautiful family ; may she give her husband ten children ! May he himself be like the eleventh !"

The Black Yajur-Veda contains a prayer in the service which the woman speaks :

I yoke thee with milk, with ghee ;  
 I yoke thee with water, and plants ;  
 I yoke thee with offspring ;  
 Today being consecrated, do thou win strength for us,  
 Let the lady of holy power advance ;

<sup>1</sup> Frieda M. Das, *Purdah, the Status of Indian Women*, pp. 19, 20

Let her sit on the altar with fair colour ;  
 Then may I, full of desire,  
 Enter my own place, here,  
 With fair offspring, with noble husband,  
 We are come to thee,  
 O Agni, to thee that deceivest the foe,  
 The undeceivable, we that are not deceived.  
 I loosen this bond of Varuna  
 Which Savitr, the kindly, hath bound,  
 And in the birthplace of the creator, in the place of good action,  
 I make it pleasant for me with my husband.<sup>2</sup>

It is the custom for the husband to put vermilion, considered the sign of marriage, in his wife's hair-parting and on her forehead. Like the seven steps it has its origin in ancient Hindu myth.

There are many accounts of modern marriage rites. The one that follows is that of *D*, whose description is in accord with other accounts, each version having some details that fit into local history.

There are two popular forms of the marriage rite, the *Sanathan*, from the old conception of religion, and the *Arya Samaj*, more popular in the North and having come from the Vedic conception, which doesn't believe in idols but in one God. There are common elements in both, and both are simplifications of the old marriages — which used to take a whole week. There are too many housing problems now to do it, and people can't take so many days for marriages. Many families try to combine the *Sanathan* and the *Arya Samaj*, but more and more they have the *Arya Samaj* because it is shorter and less expensive. If they have the money and time they prefer the *Sanathan*, which I will describe.

For some days before the marriage, the girl and the boy are given oil baths every day, in their own homes, by seven married women of their own families. This was formerly a beauty treatment, but now it is a religious ceremony. On the last day they wash the hair and put on new clothes, and they tie on the boy's and girl's wrists small bags of mustard and barley with auspicious thread — on the girl's side by her sister-in-law and on the boy's side by his sister-in-law.

The boy comes in a procession to the girl's house, the boy on a decorated horse — or, now, in a decorated open car. He has a little girl with him, just as the bride has a little boy with her. Sometimes they have more children. It is just like the *Devi Puja* (Goddess

<sup>2</sup> A. B. Keith, trans., *The Veda of the Black Yajur School Entitled Taittiriya Samhitā* (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 18; Cambridge, Mass., The Harvard University Press, 1914), p. 283, iii 5.6. a-e

Worship) for girls, with sweets for the little children. Children are very beloved, and in a marriage they are auspicious. The procession comes to the gate of the bride's family, and it is received there by the bride and her party — her relatives and friends. It is supposed to be the first time the boy and girl see each other, though this is not often true nowadays. The bride comes with a garland and puts it on the boy, and he puts one on her. She must do it first. In ancient India the girl chose her husband by putting the garland on him. (This was the "test" — the *Swayambar* of the *Ramayana*.) This is not the custom now, but occasionally today the girl will refuse to put the garland on him, and it makes a lot of trouble. But this is very rare ; no girls want to make trouble for their families. After this garland ceremony, according to the olden times, the boy's party gives the bride clothes — very beautiful ones, not the ones she wears for the ceremony. There are also ornaments, like bangles, toe rings, *kunku*. This is done now in the North, but in the South the bride gets nothing. Toe rings are worn only by married women. They are still worn very often, with special fine ones that will fit under shoes, but the practice is dying, for many people do not like to wear them. They are worn only by married women because no other women are supposed to wear ornaments. Ornaments are for the husband's pleasure. But they are not a sign of married women like your wedding ring. That is why it does not matter if women do not wear them. (Other informants said, too, that toe rings are worn less than before, though they are still common, especially with village women.) Toe rings are not important in the Punjab. Only bangles are worn after the first year of marriage there. They are red and ivory bangles, sometimes given on the one year's, one month's, eleven days', or seven days' times. They are symbolic.

After the garland ceremony and the giving of clothes and ornaments, the boy is allowed to go into the house, and the real marriage takes place. Formerly the boy's party was given a feast only after the marriage. Now, because of the shortage of time, the party is given a feast when it comes — before the marriage.

The marriage is in a decorated *pandal* (temporary shelter of bamboo and thatch), and these decorations are very important. There are four "pillars" made of painted earthen pots, on top of each other, getting smaller as they go up. They are often decorated very beautifully. These are the *mandap*, and there is a roof made of grass matting on bamboo, decorated with mango leaves, flowers, bunting, and so on. In the centre is the *balli* — the *lingam*, often called the pole. (It is the phallic symbol.) It is much thicker, with red cloth and small brass utensils tied to it. When the marriage starts it is put up, and when the marriage is over it is taken down. Near the *balli* is the *hawan* fire and an earthen pot full of water. The pot of water is very auspicious, and they often have banana leaves on the water, coconuts on the pot. Whole betel nuts are

especially auspicious. In the old days betel nuts were sent to each one as an invitation to the marriage ; nowadays they are distributed at the marriage. The swastika is always on the pots and on the clothes of the boys and girls at the marriage. It is the sign of Ganesh, and very important for marriages. Designs on the cloth gifts, on the new home, and on the floral floor design always have the swastika, as Ganesh is the God of learning and good fortune.

In the *Sanathan* marriage the boy and girl are supposed to be students — *vidyarthi* — and therefore wearing very simple dress. The girl wears a white sari and hand-stitched blouse, an unstitched petticoat, and no jewellery at that time. The boy has a simple *dhoti* and shirt. In the North these things are supplied by the bride's maternal uncle. The bride, boy, and their parents fast that day. If they get too weak to go on with the ceremony, though, they are given fruits and milk.

The Vedic *mantras* are performed by the bride and boy and the Brahmin priest in a *hawan* ceremony. Then they take seven steps — the *saptpadi* — around the fire, water pot, and *balli*. The girl starts on the right side of the boy, and their clothes are tied together. They take four steps, the girl going first, then they change sides and take the other three, their hands together. They put oblations in the fire together. The new husband (he is now a husband, because the *saptpadi* has been the marriage) puts the *kunku* on the bride's forehead and the vermilion in the parting of her hair. This is the sign of marriage. You know that a woman with a vermilion parting is married and that her husband is living. (It is a much less common custom in the South than in the North.) Some people trace it to ancient warfare, when the man put it on as a mark of victory. "With the blood of my enemy I worship you." According to Hindus, a wife is *Graha Lakshmi* — the House Goddess of Wealth — and should be worshipped.

Formerly, when the seven steps were finished, the bride's people gave a cow to the priest. Now both sides announce their donations and give money — to be sent anywhere. The boy opens something on the *balli*, supposedly with a sword. He is supposed to cut something with a sword. It comes from the old *sati* marriage, when the girl was carried away by force. When the girl's people found she was willing, they stopped fighting back and gave presents. So today whatever the boy cuts off the *balli* has presents in it, usually money from the girl's father and mother.

Then the couple go together to the family deity and bow. At this time they get sweets and food. And after this all the girls make jokes with the bride and the boys with the husband. They tease him, take a shoe, demanding money before he can get it back, and things like that.

This ceremony takes the whole night. Formerly the boys used to come earlier, on the previous afternoon — bringing younger boys, and then competed with poetry. But now they don't do this.

In the morning all the people have fun, with many frolics. All the bride's relatives give presents to the husband. And the elderly people of the bride's side, who have been staying in a guest house, go to meet the husband's party, to say many things in eulogy of each other, to embrace each other.

Before the departure of the husband and wife, they go to sit on the same *pandal* of the marriage, on a cot that is to be given the girl. Each pair, like sister and brother-in-law, uncle and aunt, go around the couple three or seven times, each time carrying barley and water in their hands, each time throwing barley on the couple and water on the ground. Then they touch the couple's feet. At the end they make presents to each, usually cash. The elderly people embrace them, give them advice, and say farewell.

The couple go in a procession to the husband's house, the people of the husband's party throwing coins on the bride. The bride's party throws rice on the procession. The husband's cousins and sisters also throw rice on the procession. These sisters and cousins stop the procession at the gate and don't let the couple go through until they are given money and presents. When they finally get to the husband's home, his mother welcomes them with *arathi* (a lamp) and with ghee. She throws flowers on them, and there is a red cloth on the ground, from the gate to the house.

All this time, while the marriage party had been away, the women in the husband's household are left behind. They play marriage at their house, having a *balli* and everything — except the *mandap*. Some of them dress up in boy's clothes and play marriage.

The couple now goes to the temple and worships the deity. Then his women relatives — his sisters, sisters-in-law, mother — get presents from him. Sometimes they play a game that is very old, from the *Mahabharata*. They put a flour fish in water and ask him to shoot it with a bow and arrow. This is just fun and frolic. The fish has a ring on it, and if the boy doesn't get it and the bride does, it shows that she will have the upper hand. At this point the boy and girl open the little bags of mustard and barley that were tied on them by their sisters-in-law. They have to open each other's, and this provides fun for all the ladies. Then the bride is supposed to put rice into milk; this is symbolic of making a rice pudding, to be distributed to all. The husband's father or mother gives her a present after this "first cooking".

In the evening there is a feast for the welcoming of the bride, to which all the relatives come, to see her face and to give her presents. That night the bride is supposed to be dressed with flowers and the honeymoon room is decorated with flowers. The bride's brother comes with her dowry. The seven women on each side that took part in the oil baths feast around the *balli*. The whole night the whole family stays awake, singing and dancing. They don't always leave the couple alone. There is much peeping, though not in good families.

The next day the couple go together and pay a return visit to the bride's parents. If it is in a different city it is impossible, and they go to the temple and act it out. Formerly, of course, when the bride was very young — not yet mature — she didn't stay with the husband at all, and there wasn't any honeymoon. Now the girl stays with him two or three days, then goes back to her father's house. Formerly she stayed a long time (up to six months); nowadays she stays only a few days. Generally she is very anxious to get back to her husband. Afterwards she may at any time be called by her parents to visit them, and then her husband calls her back after a while.

You can see that weddings of this kind are very expensive. Girls get very little, and their families have to give much. That's why people don't want girls. It is also the reason that many people are now having the Vedic ceremony — the *Arya Samaj*, which is simpler and takes less time.

In this ceremony there is also a boy's marriage procession to the girl's house, but with no small girl, no small boy. The boy and girl had no previous oil baths. And the decoration on the *pandal* is very different. They have the *mandap*, but it is more beautifully decorated, with tinsel on the roof instead of grass. There is no *balli*, but there is the waterpot and the *hawan* fire. (Some others said, however, that only the pole and the seven steps are the basic essentials.) The priest does not have to be a Brahmin, but may be any learned man. The whole ceremony is otherwise the same, but the couples nowadays don't like to be hungry. They need not go to the deity house. They are fully dressed in beautiful clothes, with full jewels and marriage sari — which the bride gets from her father.

Most marriages are mixtures of these two forms. In any case, for the entire first year of marriage, the bride is especially honoured at all feasts, getting presents.<sup>D</sup>

C described the modern marriage rite, a ceremony of two hours, thus :

They generally don't have a procession, and the marriage is at the girl's house, with a feast afterwards. The couple wear beautiful clothes. First the father officially gives his daughter to the husband, the husband taking her. (According to *F*, the father and mother jointly give the bride away. It must be done by a couple, so if one parent is missing the next eldest couple performs the duty.) Then the husband has to vow in front of the father that he will observe all religious rules and will always take care of her. She says, "I will observe all the religious rules, worship my husband, and follow my duties." They make this vow in front of *Agni* (fire, light). Then they make the seven steps — the *saptapadi* — seven steps, seven

times around the auspicious fire (there is no *balli*), walking in front of *Agni*. According to the traditional pattern the wife doesn't consummate the marriage immediately, going to her husband's room on the fourth day after the first menstruation after marriage. Today it is generally consummated at once.

It is interesting that many informants expressed shock that the Western marriage vows should contain the word "obey". They expressed their disapproval of a system in which obedience is thus legally enforced. To have such a vow in the Hindu marriage ceremony is unthinkable.\* "Wives do, in fact, generally obey their husbands, but they don't think of it in that way."<sup>c</sup> An Indian man from the South insisted that the Hindu ceremony he knows gives prominence to women, subordination to men. "The man takes the woman's toe and puts it on the curry stone. This means that he is giving assurance he will always protect her. He has the greatest responsibility in the marriage. But the man and woman are considered equals; they are considered one soul with two bodies, no separation possible. Certain things like a ring or feeding things are put in a pot; the bride and groom simultaneously put their hands in the pot — and this denotes equality. Then, to familiarize the unknown bride and groom, they put sandalwood oil on each other's arms in the presence of the gods and public. Afterwards the rites are recited in Sanskrit — sometimes now in the local language — with the promise that the couple will live together, never allowing themselves to be separated. There is no word of obedience. It isn't necessary." (This attitude is consistent with other traditions. Obedience is not seen as an externally imposed condition — but as freely given and as a part of one's duty. In return — and there is always reciprocity — the husband has the duty of protection.)

There are stories of girls remaining with their parents, after marriage, for six months after conception. The informants said this isn't done now. "The girl doesn't go home unless she is home-sick, which, of course, may be frequent. She likes to go back to her home, because she feels awkward in the presence of her husband. Some days she even stays with her mother-in-law."<sup>c</sup> (Traditionally she could not even see her husband during the day, and their relationship was wholly physical.) *F* commented similarly. "She goes home after the marriage for two to ten days. It gives her great security to go home and get the comfort of her

familiar surroundings. It tides her over, and the cutting off of her own family is not so bad. Unless her home is far away she constantly comes and goes.'"<sup>A</sup> A put a different light on her visit home. "She goes home for about seven days of marriage, staying a week or so with her own family. It is done with all groups. But it is more because she is frightened of her in-laws than anything else. She can't talk about her husband to them. Her husband actually gives her some security, but even he is a complete foreigner to her."<sup>A</sup>

Related to this feeling of belongingness to her own family is the girl's demeanour at the time of the marriage. The writer commented to *B* that she had noticed brides weeping as they were being married, and in any case had their heads lowered as if painfully shy. "Yes, that is often true. It is because the girl is downcast at leaving her own family. I remember one girl who wept and averted her face in the marriage ceremony, almost to the point of psychic trauma. And yet she was very happy three days later when I saw her with her husband. I asked her what it had been all about. 'If I had not cried my family would have thought I was happy to leave them. I did it for them.'<sup>B</sup>

*B* told of an interesting origin of the custom observed sometimes of the bride's being separated from her husband on the second night of marriage (the first being the ceremony). "It goes back to the snake-biting story of Raga and Ragin, the snake king and queen. There was this king who was told he would be killed on his marriage night, but he got married anyway, closing up everything in the room so that nothing could get in. But his wife turned into a snake and bit him, killing him."

These are common forms, then, of the marriage rite. Whether it is the old marriage ceremony of a week, the modified two or three-day *Sanathan*, or a two-hour ceremony, it is a family occasion of the greatest importance, being a linking of families, of property. And the woman herself has entered into a new group of relationships and has acquired a new social status.

### Relationships in the New Family

None of the informants said much about the father-in-law, except to indicate the married woman's acceptance of him as the head of the family. *B* said that her father-in-law encouraged her

higher education abroad far beyond her husband's wishes. "He was really interested in what I did."<sup>B</sup>

But there was consensus that the mother-in-law is often the "enemy", the "ogre", the "dragon" to the new wife.\* (Men, in a former study, said there was only harmony. "She is as a mother.") The wife has to respect her, and thus cannot be friendly, and in many cases the mother-in-law is a virtual dictator in the woman's world of the household, not to mention often that of her sons. There is little doubt that there is a good deal of hostility felt toward the mother-in-law, and also that many women become harsh mothers-in-law themselves to balance their former positions of submission. Yet it is significant that there are no mother-in-law jokes of the Western type. This may be because Hindus, whatever their private feelings, would not publicly say derogatory things about the family group or even the family concept. (Or, it may be as Margaret Mead commented to the writer, "because it is too serious to joke about".)

"There is much hostility with the mother-in-law. If men say otherwise they are just saying it to you. They know when there is trouble, because a wife does generally tell her husband of trouble with the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law and the wife don't fight. But each does as she wants, inconsiderate of the other. The conflict is there, but without fighting in the educated families. In the uneducated families there is fighting, shouting, abuse. 'She has brought no luck — she is no Lakshmi to me.' Just the same, all Indians are brought up to consideration. The highest idea for a boy is to make his parents happy. So the conflict is not so sharp as in America."<sup>X</sup>

"If a woman lives with her mother-in-law, it is the mother-in-law who manages. There are more dominant than tolerant mothers-in-law, because the mother is in a position to be dominant. There is a recognized relationship between the mother and son. The son is completely tied to his mother's apron strings. Very few sons refuse to marry those picked by their mothers. There is this strong emotional attachment, and so the mother-in-law is almost invariably hostile to the daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law becomes her outlet for hurt feelings. The mother-in-law is finally in a power position and uses it. She is invariably a very important person."<sup>X</sup>

Almost all the informants made a special point of explaining

the difference between the relationship of the husband's elder brothers and that of his younger brothers to the wife. "She has to have respect for her husband's elder brother, but can kid the younger ones."<sup>Y</sup> "There are severe restrictions between the wife and her husband's elder brother. She does not mention his name, or even appear before him without the *kunta* (veil). But her husband's younger brothers are supposed to be her best friends."<sup>A</sup> "She feels great respect for the elder brother and can't be friendly with him — as she can with the younger brothers, who are like her own brothers."<sup>C</sup> "This strained relationship to the husband's elder brother and the friendly one with the younger brothers is because age complicates things. One must show respect. But with the younger ones there is more of the mother image. The wife feels maternal toward them."<sup>F</sup> B offered one explanation for this tradition, saying that of course there is little conscious recognition of this reason. "It is because the elder brothers are potential husbands, and even to touch them physically has an incest aspect. It goes back to the Draupadi story — to the fact that Draupadi, considered a very good woman, married the five Pandava brothers — the basis of the polygamy in the South. And even now, if a woman's husband dies, she is supposed to marry an older brother. There is also the tradition from the *Laws of Manu* that if a woman is barren she may have a child by her husband's brother."<sup>B</sup> X, from the South, in commenting on this, said, "It is true that a woman can marry her husband's elder brother, but it rarely happens. There is too much emphasis on virginity, and a man wouldn't want a wife that had already been married." X said, too, that there is some incest in joint families. "The mother-in-law usually knows what is going on, but she just lets it happen within the family. The woman is helpless."<sup>X</sup>

The sisters-in-law are as sisters to the new wife and therefore friendly, but the uncles have the same authority relationship as the father-in-law, the aunts as the mother-in-law.<sup>B</sup> They are rarely mentioned with affection as are uncles and aunts in one's own home.

### Husband-wife Relationship

The wife's relationship to the husband naturally begins with the biological basis, and everything depends on the individuals

and the family group within which they live as to how far it will grow beyond that. There are conflicting opinions as to the happiness of new wives in the sex role. D, less sensitive than some to psychological factors, and always aware of social status, "thinks that most women are happy at marriage". She said, referring to the first sex experience, "I have seen happiness in their faces when they return to their families, and they are usually anxious to get back to their husbands. They have a new standing as wives. In the old days, for instance, the wife's name was always spoken first—like 'Sita and Rama', 'Radha and Krishna'. She is honoured. It is true, of course, that she shouldn't call her husband by his name, but it is because she must respect him and is true of the eldest son of the household, too. Neither is the husband supposed to call her by her name—though they often do. These rules are still true for the masses; they are 'breaking at the top', with the educated classes. The women generally stick to these proper rules more than the men. In any case, they don't mean the wife does not like her new family."

"The relation between husband and wife is purely as mates—biologically—though that is changing some today. But even today there is little companionship. (Ancient Hindu classics indicate that companionship is not a necessary adjunct of marriage.) After marriage the brother-sister relationship remains very close, and the brother usually escorts the woman to and from her home. The husband and wife seldom go out together."<sup>F</sup> B spoke even more sharply about the biological function of woman. "What I object to most is the 'milch cow' concept—that a woman must always be ready to give her husband pleasure when he wants it, without any consideration of her own wants." "The relationship between husband and wife, in the vast majority of cases, is biological. There is not the companionship of the West. There is a companionship for those who work together in the fields. Not in the joy of doing the task, but just in living, in keeping things going, in keeping the children alive. Women completely accept it. But I would demand a real companionship."<sup>x</sup>

There is emphasis, however, on the ideological equality of man and wife, only some of which is realized in actual life. "The marriage ceremony *religiously* shows equal comradeship, although it is true the *social* idea is subjugation. In life the wife does have some equal say with the husband, particularly in the upbringing

of the children, their education, their marriage. In actual practice she has much veto power."<sup>z</sup> "Women have a lot to do with the choice of mates for their children, and they give away daughters jointly with their husbands. More and more, too, they have much of the financial management of the home, some even having all the money—though the majority still have to ask for what they want. But they are increasingly doing the buying, and even if the men do, the women tell them what they want. That is a kind of power."<sup>F</sup> "Formerly wives always went with their husbands on any trips. Some wise people do it today—but not most people."<sup>D</sup> It is especially as they grow older that women fully realize their power. They are the pillars of the household, ruling the other women, in many matters even ruling the men. On the whole women are content to wait for this period of power.

There was some difference of opinion on the subject of a wife's obedience to her husband, and in general it is seen that following the husband's dictates is not understood as "obedience" via external compulsion, but as the natural wifely desire and duty to please him, to serve him. Only as women get away from the culture do they realize there is, in fact, obedience. (There are many references in ancient Hindu writings to indicate the social necessity of wifely obedience and some sanction of physical punishment as enforcement.) It is seen by Hindu women as just one part of a reciprocal relationship, husbands having their own responsibilities, including some obediences. Man and woman are each ruler in his own functional domain. *F* said, "Traditionally wives are supposed to be obedient to their husbands. There is a lot of that today. But it is especially not true of some poor, non-Aryan groups—like the Bhils, for instance, where there is a lot of give and take. South India is, of course, more orthodox."

*C*, who had been analyzing the concept, wrote thus :

Our men are still under the impression that their wives should obey them. In fact, sometimes I think the essential qualification of the good wife is her obedience. I think it may be due to our economic conditions. In our family pattern the husband is the only earning hand, and all the other members are dependent upon him. So naturally he becomes the ruler of the home. More recently, women are taking up jobs of various kinds and thus securing economic independence. (*C*, however, was not advocating economic independence).

In modern families women are conscious about their position in

the home, and they prove their importance by their capacity. . . . Women always like to manage the home and look after the children. They also like to look after their husbands' likes and dislikes and comforts personally. If the economic position compels a woman to support the family finance she has to remain away from her dear ones for the major part of the day. . . . In my country it is still the wife who makes the major adjustments to marriage. . . . Our custom is to have the husband support the family, and to leave all the management of the home and money to the wife is better. I know that in this system the wife has very little opportunity to work outside the home and to make full use of her capacities. But this arrangement keeps the harmony in the family. Both husband and wife are rulers in two different fields.

C went on to give one of the requisites of harmonious marriage. "Each must behave mannerly and impressively in society. The person whom we love most must not become the target of laughter in the society." C made a special point of deploring what she considers an undue emphasis on sex life. "Sex life does not make for happy marriage. Happiness comes from compromise. Try to forget your differences and try to make the other one happy. This feeling of sacrifice is greatly useful for the happiness of the family."

It was noted that D's mother, as well as D and her sister, became vegetarians in honour of the husband and father. F told of the successful Indianization of an American woman who married an Indian Moslem, thereafter not eating pork, even in her husband's absence. "One would expect this of an Indian, but not of an American."<sup>F</sup> She mentioned an incident in the same family, however, to show how in another respect the woman had not Indianized. "The mother, who in most ways is very Indian, told the children to get food from the ice-box when they wanted it. Her husband was shocked and said he would get the food for them, because it is the Indian custom for the mother to serve food to the others. It is unthinkable for her to let people help themselves. So she had no choice but to get the food for her children, although they understood the Western custom."<sup>F</sup>

F went on to comment on the strong sense of "becoming one" that is the Indian ideal of marriage having been impressed by the truth of the "he-she-one" rhythm that is an intrinsic part of the marriage rites described in Hilda Wernher's *The Land and the Well*. "That is very Indian—becoming one together, achieving

a strong oneness."<sup>3</sup> This togetherness, this oneness, is undoubtedly an important reason why Indians find it difficult to conceive of themselves as "æelves", as individuals. The physical and spiritual union is a marked characteristic of the happily married couple, especially in the cases of those who are consciously trying to go back to the ancient Vedic idea of equality and co-operation, in service to the home and husband but also in service to the larger community. The latter cannot be competitive to the former, for husband and wife are one in their actions and sense of service. This Vedic ideal is noticeable today, for many educated Indians of the past half-century have analyzed the various corruptions of the original philosophy. There is, therefore, much conscious re-creation of the Vedic ideal.

Mrs. Das<sup>3</sup> writes that the principle of the Vedas, though in contradiction to the *Laws of Manu*, flows down through the epic times to the very present. "The relationship between the husband and wife is still one of confidence, trust, and joy. . . . Men find pure delight in their wives." The wife is a Shakuntala, who herself in the legend says a wife

is an object of honour in the house ; it is she who rears the children. The bride is the breath of life to her husband, and she is all devotion to her master. She is the half of man, the best of his friends, the source of well-being, wealth and happiness, the root of the family and of its perpetuity .... Sweet-spoken wives are ever partakers of joy, ministering helpers in hours of sorrow and sickness .... Men who have wives accomplish well the sacred ceremonies and fulfil the duties of head of the house. . . . Such men are filled with joy, and the happiness of salvation is assured to them. Wives are friends in the wilderness, giving consolation by their gentle discourse ; they are like fathers in the serious duties of life, they become like mothers in times of distress .... Whoever has a wife is sure of support ; that is why wives offer the best refuge in life."<sup>4</sup>

The author does, however, make the strong position in her book that women are submissive to men, and that they live only through their husbands. As prescribed by Manu, Heaven is attained only through the husband and as a reward for having duly worshipped the husband as a god on earth. "Today orthodox Hindu women perform the ceremony of 'taking the dust of the lotus feet' of

<sup>3</sup> Frieda M. Das, *Purdah, the Status of Indian Women*, p. 38

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42

their lords as their first act of worship on rising each morning.”<sup>5</sup> It should not be interpreted, however, that this “worship” is anything but pleasure and privilege to the Hindu wife. Mrs. Das, who writes with bitterness over the practice of *purdah*—a corruption of Hindu ideals—has nothing but praise for the Hindu wife who lives a full, rich life in the ancient Hindu tradition. She describes, for instance, the life of Lady Abala Bose, a good friend of hers.

### Three Modern Marriages in Vedic Ideal

#### *Lady Abala Bose*

Lady Abala Bose was the daughter of a reformer in the Brahmo Samaj (a Hindu reform group), had never been in *purdah*, and had had the rare privilege of physical exercise as a girl.

She took a four-year course in medicine in Madras, being the first woman of her section to take up such studies. At twenty-two she married a young Bengali professor of physics at Calcutta University, a man who had voluntarily taken it upon his shoulders to liquidate a debt of his father's of Rs. 40,000, though under no legal obligation to do so. For years they both sacrificed many a comfort until this load was off their shoulders. But even afterwards, Abala Bose continued to supervise personally every detail of the expanding household, taking that intimate, motherly, unobtrusive interest in the welfare of every creature under her roof which is so characteristic of Indian housewives. Every morning by seven she had already bathed and breakfasted. Breakfast-time was also the visiting hour for friends and relatives, and as often as not for people who came to consult her on outside matters. Breakfast cleared away, Abala Bose sat on talking with these visitors, but her hands were not idle — she herself prepared every bit of the vegetables and fruits needed for that day. She pared them, cut them into cubes and slices, washed each ready pile once, and then let the pieces drop into shining brass bowls full of clear water, so that the cook had nothing more to do than make them into delicious curries or other dishes. Thus, even in this modernized household, the absolute purity of food was as rigidly controlled and ensured as it is in orthodox families where the housewife, no matter how high her rank, first bathes, and then dons a special clean linen sari to prepare and cook the food with care as scrupulous as if performing a religious ceremony. Not only that, but Abala Bose herself makes all the purchases for the household, driving to the New

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

Market for that purpose, closely examining all she buys, and driving good bargains, for no one knows better than she the value of money and what great things even a little of it can accomplish in impoverished India. For her house and family she purchases largely Indian materials, and is fully alive to their beauty. She keeps the accounts, writes out the laundry list for the dhobi, engages and supervises the durzi in his mending and making of new clothes, sees that the entire house is kept spotless despite listless servants, bandages cut fingers, entertains guests, arranges the usual dinner for about six people or a special feast for sixty, with the same unruffled, unhurried, competent ease and dispatch. At each and every turn she looks to the minutest details of her absent-minded husband's comforts, his clothes, his food, his appointments. Nothing is ever forgotten, nothing only half done. At every meal she sees to it that he has only just what is good for him; knowing his impatience and carelessness, every little is made ready for him as if for a baby. None of these personal details is left to servants. The orange pulp on the plate before him has not a trace of skin or seed, the shelter of the mosquito curtain not a single imprisoned tormentor, as a result of her care. Every evening at dusk, no matter how absorbed or unwilling he may be, she persuades, cajoles, or purloins her husband from his preoccupations, to take the ride in the open air so necessary to his health and work. Before or after their return and dinner, there are endless letters to write, more visitors to talk to, and the family to settle to sleep.<sup>6</sup>

It is true that Abala Bose had no children, but the life in the household was only half of her life. She was interested in the status of women, in getting women out of *purdah*, in educating widows in vocational work. She was the founder of the Nari Siksha Samiti (Women's Educational League) and was one of the founders of the Brahmo Girls' School, thus living in integrated fashion the ideal of service, to husband and to community.

### *Saroj Nalini*

A biography of another great Indian woman, Saroj Nalini, written by her husband, shows this same realization of the Vedic ideal in modern times. An informant, commenting on this biography, said, "And this in Bengal, where women have no place at all".

A model daughter, who grew up in a joint family and who was educated at home, Saroj Nalini took great pride in doing things for her father—like taking his milk to him in bed every day and looking in his shoes for snakes and scorpions. She became a model

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176

wife. Saroj Nalini managed to go with her husband on many of his trips, even when it meant taking the baby with them and travelling by bullock cart to camp. She learned to ride horseback, riding side-saddle, so as to accompany him, learned to drive a pony trap and a car. She taught herself typing so as to help with his work, and learned all she could about his work. She played tennis, but always in a sari, "never losing her dignity," and went shooting for tigers. Her chief duty was "harmonizing conflicting elements" in the home and society, and to this end she made up as best she could her educational deficiencies, even learning perfect English. All this did not mean that she neglected her household duties, even though they had servants. "If I neglect my duties at home I shall lose my right to do my duties to society." She did a lot of sewing and handwork, and every day she cooked at least one dish for her husband.<sup>7</sup>

At heart she was a woman of ancient India, liking the turmeric ceremony and liking to chew *pan*—"but her lips did not discolour. There is a superstition that immunity from discolouring is enjoyed by wives who are loved by their husbands." She always wore the conch shell bangles and the gold-plated iron bangle on her left wrist, common in Bengal—"the failure to wear them brings bad luck to the husband". Each morning she put the vermilion parting in her hair. She would never let her husband touch her feet or tie her shoe-laces, would never take her meals before her husband, however late he was, and touched the feet of her elders as a sign of deep family affection. On the day of the Brother festival she put sandalwood paste dots on her brother, and called her elder brothers and sisters by their Indian names, in order of their seniority. She wrote to her husband, "I want this blessing from you, that I may die at your feet with my sankha (conch shell bangles) and vermilion intact, and leaving you and my son in health and comfort. . . . How can you, with your modern education, understand the meaning of a Hindu wife's ideals? . . . I shall go first, of course, but I shall wait for you."<sup>8</sup>

Saroj Nalini's ideals were Savitri and Sita, and her husband commented, "If a woman is not wholly good or chaste, her education, rank, splendour, all are absolutely useless". She worked

<sup>7</sup> G. S. Dutt, *A Woman of Bengal, Being the Life of Saroj Nalini* (London, Hogarth Press, 1929), pp. 18-30

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-4, 60

much with men, but was shy, avoiding men when her husband was not present. Her busy day included prayer, gardening, a walk with her husband, giving pantry orders to the cook, preparing some vegetables, cooking, supervising the household work, seeing to her correspondence, reading, knitting or sewing, singing, shopping, going to get her husband from his office, playing tennis, visiting with friends, going to meetings, doing accounts after dinner, singing with her husband and evening prayer. She had her own bank account, but would never use it for her own dresses and jewellery, which her husband always bought for her. She converted her husband's and son's birthdays into festive days, decorating the house and dining table with flowers and presents, cooking the feast herself. On her husband's birthday she would touch his feet.<sup>9</sup>

Here is the husband's tribute to his wife :

In Saroj Nalini there was tenderness blended with firmness ; love of beauty with love of work ; sweetness with industry ; courage with modesty ; love of outdoor games with the full measure of a woman's grace ; love of fun with inward purity ; a housewife's skill with aesthetic refinement ; elegance with economy ; simplicity with good taste ; patriotism with freedom from fanaticism ; love for the past with a zeal for reform ; a charming sociability with immaculate innocence of character .... She had the simple naturalness and humility of an Indian woman. Openly she never opposed me. On the contrary, she used to let me have my own way, and in order to keep me pleased tried to behave in the way I desired ; and yet all the time, by the firmness, gentleness, and humility of her character, she was slowly but silently working a change in mine and bringing me back to naturalness. (He had been changed by Western education and values). . . . (She had) spirituality, firmness, and bedrock qualities of the character of the typical Indian woman .... In matters of intellect and reasoning Saroj Nalini learnt at my feet like an eager and diligent pupil, but in all that relates to character it was she who was the teacher. . . . Saroj Nalini's character . . . had retained to its full depth the intense spirituality and faith in God that is part of an Indian woman's being .... I placed the main reliance of my own life on reason .... She placed that of hers on love .... The ultimate truths of life can be reached only through the path of love.<sup>10</sup>

Saroj Nalini, who felt marriage a sacred tie, when separated from her husband, wrote every day. Her husband quotes one letter, written on their wedding anniversary.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-44

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-9

God of my heart . . . you who are the light of my life. This day eighteen years ago I did not get united to a stranger. You have been mine from all eternity. This is only the anniversary of the day of our union on this earth . . . Have I really been able to make you happy, Gurudev (Teacher-god)? My life, then, has not been wasted. Oh, to know that he who is dearer to me than life is happy ! Is not that the highest fruition of my life? My own Gurudev, I want nothing else .... I only want your love while I live on earth, and your feet to lay my head on when I pass away.<sup>11</sup>

Saroj Nalini wanted to visit her husband's ancestral home, though he feared his orthodox village would not welcome her—an educated woman.

The real fact was that, being a Hindu woman at heart, she felt a deep longing to meet and be met by her husband's people and to be received by them as a bride. . . . In the estimation of orthodox Hindus, European women as a class were bluestockings who never turned their hands to any domestic work such as cooking or cleaning. All "mems" were, to them, perfectly frivolous creatures, who merely rode and danced and read novels, and who left the feeding of their children and the care of the household to their ayahs. Unlike Hindu women, mems were immodest and unwomanly and paid no ceremonious respect to their elder relatives. They never rinsed their mouths or washed their hands after meals. Why, mems did not even show respect to their husbands, but regarded them merely as their servants ! A mem was graceless and jumpy in her movements and supercilious in her manner, always turned up her nose at simple village folk and their ways. Mems did not suckle their babies but left them to be fed from the bottle by their ayahs ! Not only European women as a class, but all the modern educated Indian women were, in the eyes of the villager, so many mems. Did they not affect the ways of mems? . . . Yes, modern education argued the simple Indian villager, was no good for their women ! It spoiled their simple character and turned them into so many mems. But they saw in Saroj Nalini a Hindu wife who liked pan, who was barefoot and in simple sari, conch shell bangles on her wrists. The women said, "Bau-ma (little mother) is the image of Lakshmi," and the priests said, "Bau-ma displays all the attributes of Saraswati and is a real Sahadharmini (comrade-in-duty) to her husband."<sup>12</sup>

It was one of the missions of Saroj Nalini's life—and also of her husband's—that women should again, as in Vedic days, fulfil their social duties outside the home. (This is consistent with the

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 56

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-7

traditional four stages of life—studentship, marriage and family, semi-retirement and community service, full retirement and meditation.) Her husband wrote:

Is it not a fact that even at the present time in Bengal a housewife, in referring to her work, always speaks of her *ghar-sansar* (home-world). . . . This conclusively proves that in the old times the woman's legitimate sphere of work in our country was considered to be not the home alone but the world as well as the home, neither of which can be neglected without great detriment to the other. In the course of time the men of our country, in their blind and short-sighted selfishness, persuaded the women to believe that their world was synonymous with their homes and to confine their activities and their outlook within the four walls of their home alone, to the utter neglect of all that appertains to the outside world.<sup>13</sup>

It was not an easy fight that the reformers undertook, for many women thought as the elderly Hindu lady who said, "We know everything that a woman need learn. What need is there for us to know or learn anything concerning the outside world? That is the business of men."

Saroj Nalini, especially after travelling with her husband in England and Japan and seeing women there, worked unceasingly for the education of girls, for the remarriage of widows, for an end to *purdah*. She literally wore herself out in her zeal. The greatest opposition came from orthodox older women, and she had to persuade mothers-in-law, more than husbands, to let women be educated. "Saroj Nalini clearly realized that in the social and domestic sphere in Indian life the real power lay not with the males but with the senior female members of the household, and that no advance could be made . . . without enlisting them."<sup>14</sup>

Saroj Nalini herself was a living example of what she asked. "Devotion to home, husband, son, were her first care in life, but she sought also to consecrate herself to the service of her country." Gertrude Brown wrote of her thus :

As a general rule the horizon of the Indian woman is bounded by the four walls of her courtyard. She is taught the truth that the highest ideal of life is service, but to her so often that means only service of her husband and her family. Saroj Nalini . . . was one of a comparatively few who have a larger vision and have been able to realize that to confine one's service to one's own is, after

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96

all, only a superior form of selfishness, and that our desire to serve should not stop at our own family, nor even at our own land, but should embrace the whole human race. . . . The only adequate motive for such service is love.<sup>15</sup>

And Tagore wrote, in the preface to this biography:

In the present age our ideal is no longer that of the woman who is only a housewife and nothing more, but the woman who works for the weal of home and community alike. It is no longer the woman whose life is cast in the time-worn mould of provincial custom and tradition that is most needed, but she in whom the stream of intellect and emotion emanating from the vast universe are not hindered from mingling in a deep and beautiful harmony. It is this ideal which we find realized in Saroj Nalini's life."<sup>16</sup>

### *Ramabai Ranade*

Another biography, coming from the west coast of India, the Bombay area, shows the same idealization of the Vedic principle. Ramabai Ranade, the wife of the famous Justice Ranade, wrote her autobiography in Marathi, now literally translated into English.

Ramabai was brought up in a very strict, orthodox home, where girls were guarded from modern ideas and where no women or girls over eight were allowed to appear before the men, go outside the house, or receive any education. One man, a member of the family, was said to have died as a punishment to his wife for teaching her Sanskrit. Girls were not allowed to speak to their father in the presence of the mother-in-law, and as the mother-in-law was usually there, the girls grew up without knowing their father and lived in terror of him. When his mother died the father began to pet his baby daughter, Ramabai. This father was hot-tempered, and no one in the family "dared breathe a syllable," but he was the god and *guru* (teacher) of his wife.<sup>17</sup>

Ramabai was married at eleven, by Vedic rites, but the unhappy bridegroom wouldn't eat and locked himself in his own room. His first wife had died just a month previously, and only filial duty had brought him to another wedding. His father, three days after the death of his son's first wife, had arranged the new marriage, fearful that his son, who was interested in social reform, would

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>17</sup> Ramabai Ranade, *Himself, the Autobiography of a Hindu Lady*, Katherine Gates, ed. and trans. (New York, Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., 1938), pp. 2-7

marry a widow or educated adult woman, which would have been a disgrace. The son protested, begging for a year's engagement, but the father said, "If I listen to you . . . I truly fear that I will be ruining my chances for peace and real comfort during my declining years."<sup>18</sup>

Ramabai's own father instructed the girl bride thus : "I expect my little daughter's conduct to add lustre to our family name. Whatever trouble comes, endure it silently, and don't talk back even to a servant. Remember to control yourself even if something seems utterly unendurable. Never repeat tales to your husband ; malicious whisperings have destroyed kingdoms, not to mention families ! If you learn to endure, your value will greatly increase, and the purpose for which you were born into our family will be realized."<sup>19</sup>

The young bride grew, developed, and flowered under the gentle and wise guidance of the patient and loving husband, who had not wanted to marry this girl, but who accepted her fully as his wife when they were married, thus realizing his own responsibility. The bride's greatest trouble was in Himself's determination to educate her, and he taught her to read, write, and figure, promising a tutor later. (Ramabai never referred to her husband by name.) Another trouble was the jealousy of the other women of the household, a jealousy manifested by many cruel jests and acts on the part of the sisters-in-law and older women. But Ramabai was obedient to her father's command, her duty, her function. "Whatever had to be done, I did it uncomplainingly."

Himself belonged to the Prarthana Saman, a group advocating a return to the ancient purity of Hinduism—with a removal of idol worship, caste distinctions, and the ban against the remarriage of widows. He had the women eat meals with the men, except when there was company, and he gave over all his salary to his wife. There were servants, but Himself didn't approve of wives leaving all the work to servants. He encouraged a social life, urging Ramabai to have "at homes", but the reluctant Ramabai was at first very shy. At her first public function, at which she was to make a speech and garland the president—an Englishman—she refused to offer the garland. "The very idea of being so bold as to approach any man, let alone an Englishman, was repugnant to me."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-18

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-55

But the wife gained confidence. "I learned that if the mistress of the house is an affectionate, devout, and actively busy person, all the members of the family will be happy, upright and useful, and their days will be so pleasant that they will think their home is Heaven on earth, as indeed it is!" Her husband knew of the tormenting of the other women, and said to his wife, "Some days are the mother-in-law's and some are the daughter-in-law's. Don't lose control and treat them rudely or disrespectfully. . . . Never talk back to them." The wife completely succeeded in this command. "I knew that I had to do the things Himself approved, whatever happened, for I was determined that there should be no rift in the place where my peace and comfort were. . . . His approval was the one thing I dared not sacrifice."<sup>21</sup>

Himself woke her every day at four-thirty, a great physical hardship for the young girl as she never had enough sleep—to share the reading of Tukaram hymns. These morning hours were very precious to her. She massaged his feet with ghee as he read. "At such moments, in that lovely light of the earliest dawn, when I saw his countenance filled with worship, my own heart overflowed with tenderness, and my love for him and my worship of him increased involuntarily. When I was alone my mind would be filled with thoughts of him in our human relations. But in those morning hours I was conscious, though for a moment at a time only, of a kind of spiritual power in him, and I saw him as an almost superhuman being."<sup>22</sup>

Caring for her husband was her greatest joy. She went touring with him when she could, seeing that the women did the sweeping and sprinkling at camp, taking his food to him herself. If she could not go, when he returned from a trip she was pleased to serve him the fresh fruit, almonds, and pistachio nuts that he liked after his dinner. She would, each day, take his clothes and shoes when he came home, after "taking the dust of his feet" and touching it to her forehead—a "mode of expressing humility, gratitude, or supplication used only for the men in the immediate family". She was ever busy in such service. "How can a Hindu woman enjoy sitting and being fanned, leaving her work before the food is ready for the menfolk?"<sup>23</sup>

She did continue her education, her husband constantly urging her to do so and to enlarge her social duties. But to her the educa-

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78    <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 93-4    <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 79, 93, 94, 145

tion had only one aim. "The fruit of true education must be sincere humility. . . . It is well for us to learn to be sincerely humble and to treat our husbands and older men with respect and obedience, however much learning, wealth or power we may have attained as our glory." The older women were much disturbed that the younger women were appearing in front of men in their outside work. One older woman expressed herself thus : "It's only at the time of *punyaharachan* (wedding ceremony) that wives may sit near their husbands in the presence of a few people, and even then only with bent head and without courage to lift their faces. Nowadays, love means for a woman boldly to wrap her garment about her and be near her husband, to sit on a chair, to read and write like a man—to such a state have we come !"<sup>24</sup>

Ramabai came to suffer ill-health and doctors proposed a dangerous operation, from which she might not recover. "A wife is like a shadow. . . . I can't tell about Himself and his state of mind in regard to me, without mentioning myself. . . . The only reason for my living is that, being well, I might serve Himself with my own hands and care for him when he is suffering. If I couldn't do that, wouldn't death be better?" She minded most her husband's suffering on her behalf. Her complete philosophy of wifehood she summed up thus : "A wife's truest obligation is to protect her beloved husband from suffering of any kind at any time. This is her desire throughout her life, and to this she bends every effort in things great or small. This is her blessed privilege and her religious duty."<sup>25</sup>

### The Fulfilment of Womanhood, Feminine Power

We see, thus, the concept of duty and service implicit in marriage. A Hindu, Coomaraswamy, wrote : "The West is concerned with rights, not duties, with desires to be leased from responsibilities. The way of ego-assertion cannot be a royal road to realization of the Self."<sup>26</sup> He goes on to speak of marriage, contrasting the Indian and Western concepts.

"According to Hindu sociologists, marriage is a social and ethical relationship, and the begetting of children the payment of a debt.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83 105,

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 229

<sup>26</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva* (New York, Sunwise Turn, 1924) p. 86

... Romantic love is anti-social, as every glimpse of Union is a denial of the Relative. . . . In Hindu marriage happiness will arise from the fulfilment of vocation. . . . The Oriental marriage. . . is the fulfilment of a traditional design, and doesn't depend upon the accident of sensibility. To be such a man as Rama, such a wife as Sita, rather than to express 'oneself' is the aim. The formula is predetermined; husband and wife alike have parts to play; and it is from this point of view that we can best understand the memory of Manu's law, that a wife should look on her husband as a god, regardless of his personal merits or demerits—it would be beneath her dignity to deviate from a woman's norm merely because of the failure of a man. It is for her own sake and for the sake of the community rather than for his alone, that life must be attuned to the eternal unity of Purusha and Prakriti. . . . Hindu society is based on group morality, with the freedom of the individual subject to the interest of the group. The concept of duty is paramount. . . . It is logical that Hindu marriage should be indissoluble. It is logical that Hindu marriage should allow a second wife if the first is childless. . . . A Hindu woman is given the opportunity to *realize* rather than to express herself. She is given the opportunity to be a woman. . . . Woman represents the continuity of the racial life, an energy which cannot be divided or diverted without a corresponding loss of racial vitality; she can no more desire to be something other than herself than the Vaishya could wish to be known as a Kshatriya, or the Kshatriya as a Brahmin. . . . We do not identify freedom with self-assertion. . . . The Oriental woman is what she is, only because our social and religious culture has permitted her to be and to remain essentially feminine. . . . The Indian ideal is not the exclusive treasure of any one race or time. It reappears wherever woman is set free to be truly herself. . . . wherever a sufficiently religious, heroic and aesthetic culture has afforded her the necessary protection.”<sup>27</sup>

Coomaraswamy sees deterioration of the feminine ideal in industrialism and in an “organization of society for competition and exploitation”. He deplores certain aspects of feminism, seeing in it an unquestioning acceptance of male values.

A condescension—a profound self-distrust. . . . Like industrial man, the modern woman values industry more than leisure, she seeks in every way to externalize her life, to achieve success in men's professions, she feigns to be ashamed of her sexual nature, she claims to be as reasonable, as learned, as expert as any man, and her best men friends make the same claim on her behalf. But just in proportion as she lacks a genuine feminine idealism, inasmuch as she wishes to be something other than herself, she lacks power.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-9, 94

Coomaraswamy does not admit, as many other Hindu men might, that women could retain this feminine power in extended service to the community, and he contends that "for the greatest abundance of life there is requisite the greatest possible sexual differentiation".<sup>28</sup>

Coomaraswamy sees woman as *Prakriti*, the Eternal Energy of ancient Hinduism, "the energy without which action may be impossible. As pure male the Great God is inert, and his 'power' is always feminine, and it is she who leads the hosts of heaven against the demons. . . . Woman possesses the power of perpetually creating in man the qualities she desires, and this is for her an infinitely greater power than the possession of those special qualities could ever confer on her directly."<sup>29</sup>

Even in conceding that Coomaraswamy may be revealing a personal bias in his attitude toward women, his remarks are pertinent to the basic factor in feminine power and the fulfilment of womanhood—that of differentiation of sex and function, without competition. We have noted, for instance, the complete lack of competition with the functions of men in the lives of Lady Abala Bose, Saroj Nalini, and Ramabai Ranade. Furthermore, they engaged in community work with the help, co-operation, and encouragement of their husbands. It was as if the one-with-two-halves was functioning, so that the ideal of equality, symbolized in the marriage rite, is carried through to actual marriage, the symbol of the sacred fire denoting woman's creative function within the home as well as her active energy in relationship to her husband. This divided function, together with a oneness as a result of immature persons moulding their personalities together, achieves the harmony that is so important to Hindu social and religious philosophy.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-100

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 101

## Motherhood

THE SUBJECT OF motherhood cannot be properly separated from marriage, but it is so important in India that it requires special treatment. We have seen in this study that Hindu girls in their formative years are trained for the experience and duty of motherhood. It is important, further, that we see some of the aspects of motherhood that are so much a part of the culture that they do not need formal training. Much of the feminine role is unconsciously interiorized because of them.

In this chapter we shall examine universal motherhood, its symbols and status ; the psychological results of dualisms in the concept of motherhood ; and some of the followers of the Mother cult. In these followers we have the manifestations of the ideology, and in them we have the national saints and teachers held so high before the population for reverence and honour.

### Universal Motherhood

Coomaraswamy says :

Savitri, Padmavati, Sita, Radha, Uma, Lilavati, Tara—our divine and human heroines—have a universal fellowship, for everything feminine is of the Mother. . . . It is customary for Hindus, when occasion arises for them to address an unknown woman, to call her 'mother' . . . . These unseen walls give a seclusion equally absolute without purdah. One result is that the streets of an Indian city by night are safer for a woman than those of any city in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva*, p. 94

This was also the observation of a foreigner, Abbe Dubois, many years ago : " I have often spent the night in one of the common rest-houses, where the men and women lodging there were lying all huddled together anyhow and almost side by side ; but I have never known or heard of anyone disturbing the tranquillity of the night by indecent act or word."<sup>2</sup>

" The fundamental Aryan attitude toward woman is as ' ma,' even to her husband," Mrs. Das writes. " The idea of all-encompassing motherhood as the highest principle was firmly accepted in Vedic times, transmitted to all later periods, and has throughout all ages formed the basis of the exceptional degree of reverence paid in India to the mother." This concept is symbolized in many ways, perhaps most notably by the sacred cow—the great mother, giver of food. It is symbolized also in the cry for freedom—*Bande Mataram* (Serve the Great Mother). " That cry supplanted the old call to the worship of ancient goddesses with a vital flaming immediacy and directness ; it supplanted in the minds of women the old duty of service and adoration of the husband."<sup>3</sup>

It has been explicit and implicit in all the descriptive material given by informants that a woman's whole stature and relationship to family and society change as she becomes a mother. " That is because everything is for the sake of the second generation, for the institution of the family. Even couples that are not in the family favour—even if they are Europeans or of another caste—are accepted when they have children, for the sake of the grandchildren. Especially when a woman is a mother of a son her position in the household becomes stable."<sup>B</sup>

This yearning for children is pure pathos in the case of barren women—who go to the temple to worship Kali, who place offerings on trees, who go through rites of all kinds in order to have children. (The *Vatapurnima* of the fifteenth day [full moon] of the third Hindu calendar month. It is the worship of the *Va* tree, under which Savitri is said to have brought back her husband from death. This tree-worship, connected with fertility, is no idle tradition today. There are many trees along the roadside, festooned with offerings.) The writer saw a " ceremony for barren women " in a village of South India, this ceremony being an annual

<sup>2</sup> Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, p. 340

<sup>3</sup> Frieda M. Das, *Purdah, the Status of Indian Women*, p. 20. See also M. R. Dholakia, *Mother and Mother's 1000 Names* (Bangalore, Modi, 1940)

affair there. The barren women, most of them young, were first bathed by their families in the village tank—many of them stood in the water for several hours, as the proceedings in the temple took a long time. They were then placed prone, face down, on the main village road, their arms extended above their heads, their hands together and holding plantains, coconut, and betel leaves. For a long time there had been drumming and music at the temple, where the priest was “getting ready,” and the bulk of the swarming crowd was concentrated at the temple. Finally, accompanied by shouting and frenzied tom-tomming, the priest came out, holding on his head a tall phallic symbol covered with marigolds. Supported by two men, the priest, seemingly in semi-trance, walked along the road, stepping on the backs of the prone women. Many of the women were limp, some were rigid and foaming at the mouth. Their husbands picked them up, sometimes carrying them down the road for a second “step”. This ceremony took many hours altogether, and the women involved were in a state of cataleptic exhaustion at the end.

Women need children in order to achieve their social status, to receive respect from their husbands, families, and communities, and to fulfil their own personal lives. “When we say ‘wifehood’ we also mean ‘motherhood’ . They go together. Barren women try very hard to have children. They are not chastised when they don’t have children, but they are made to feel that something is missing.”<sup>x</sup> (This social attitude is seen in ritual, ancient and modern. The solar festival, *Makara Shamkranti*, includes the ritual of women who desire children secretly dropping a coconut into some vessel in a Brahmin house ; the seasonal festival, Gauri, honours Gauri, the wife of Siva and mother of Ganesh, the goddess of harvest and protectress of women.)

This emphasis on motherhood in the ideology, plus the social implications, plus the psychological necessity in the woman’s life to have this one creation, this one power, explains the general attitude toward mothers—explains the joy women experience in having children—explains why “pregnant women are auspicious”. In having a child a woman has contributed—as *she alone can do*—to the family, to the husband, to the community. It gives her a sense of power, security, and success.

On the whole there is contentment in this self-fulfilment.\* Indians see it so, and particularly in the villages where there are

virtually no material choices and possessions, children are a mark of wealth and success, no matter how hungry each additional one might make the whole group. Among the highly educated there are, as in all countries, a growing number of families concerned with planned parenthood and birth control, and practising it.<sup>c</sup> Today, with independent India facing the problems of over-population, there is increasing talk of "population control" as a national necessity, and it is consistent with the culture that few think the methods of the West—which involve a large amount of individual choice and decision—will work well in India, at least with the masses. There is, on the other hand, a ready acceptance of some form of social control, where the nation as a whole may apply a mandate for sterilization "when there are a sufficient number of children in the family".

### The Psychological Results of Dualisms

Sex has a dual position to the Indian woman, being the means of her attainment of fulfilment but also something which in the early years of her life is "bad" and which, at least in theory, should later be controlled and eliminated. Sex is, moreover, the constant symbol of her restriction from certain functions. It is true that Hindus would think less of the restrictive aspect than Westerners, since they place positive value on the differentiated being. However, the *Laws of Manu* abound in restrictions for women, and even the earlier *Satapatha Brahmana* says :

He girds her with a cord ; for, with a cord they yoke the draught-animal. Impure is that part of woman which is below the navel ; and therewith she will be facing the sacrificial butter. That part of her he thereby conceals with the cord, and only with the pure upper part of her body she then faces the sacrificial butter.<sup>4</sup>

We must recognize, of course, that the functional patterning of Hindu philosophy gives stages for desire and for freedom from desire, but the fact remains that within the woman's life sex is both "good" and "bad". Mrs. Das says :

"Sex is the strongest and most dreaded antagonist to be overcome within oneself. So, sex, with its stress on motherhood as its highest

<sup>4</sup> *Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896), XII, p. 259, 1.3.1, 13

expression, always remained on the one hand a sanctified principle worthy of worship ; on the other it became the dragon in the path of final attainment. . . . It accentuated an adoration of the female principle in divinity with its inherent tendency to ecstatic spiritual uplift. . . . It was the process of rendering powerless and degrading the woman of flesh and blood. The more the living woman was being deprived of freedom of thought and movement, and the dignified consideration that had been hers in Vedic times, the more did men and priests appear to be moved by an uneasy, unformulated feeling that the goddess in heaven and woman in the flesh might after all make common sense against the aggressor. . . . But although modern Indian men still worship feminine divinities and easily express themselves in mystic ecstasy over mother-worship, few among them have cared to follow that guiding thread to any practical purpose. . . . It makes them ashamed of the present and proud of the past.”<sup>5</sup>

Mrs. Das makes special pleas against the practice of *pardah* and against early marriage—both rare now. But the patterns of authority in the family remain more or less as depicted in her book, and in the more orthodox homes the psychological experience of the young bride is a severe strain. Mrs. Das is not writing a polemic against India, but like Saroj Nalini, Ramabai Ranade, their husbands, and a great many Hindu reformers, she pleads against the corruption of Hinduism and for a return to Vedic philosophy. With her particular training in psychology she has analyzed the experiences of marriage in terms of its effects on (1) the wife, (2) the son, and (3) the concept of motherhood. Here we see a second dualism—that of the ideal mother vs. the physical mother. (Abbé Dubois noted the same thing : “ Low estimation of women in private life, respect for them in public ”.<sup>6</sup>)

At an age when girls in the West play eagerly and under little restraint in unconscious joy of free bodily movement, when their minds begin to expand and drink in wider knowledge of the outer world, the little Indian girl is suddenly shut away from all play and all further sight of outsiders, especially men. She gets no more exercise, little fresh air and sunshine, and usually at the age of twelve has all the airs and manners of a full-grown sedate woman. So, unfree and unsure of herself, without emotional discipline or resistance of mind, with body weakened and immature, she is taken into some strange household as its youngest bride. There she is the central object of curiosity; her garments, ornaments, behaviour are minutely examined, compared, criticized. She must be absolutely obedient

<sup>5</sup> Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 26

<sup>6</sup> Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 336-43

to all, instantly willing to render any service demanded by any older person. She may not speak unless spoken to, may not wear what she pleases, may not buy, choose, or order anything on her own initiative. Her sisters-in-law spy upon her every action and she is sharply reprov'd for any shortcoming. In poor families she is made to work harder than a servant would be. In an affluent family, some single uninteresting task is assigned to her, such as picking over rice, drudgery with no educative quality whatever. The strict discipline of obedience is suddenly substituted for the lax indifference or indulgence of the parental home, and is her only training and education.

But probably most far-reaching in its ultimate results is the form which a young bride's relation to her husband is bound to take in a joint household where her every move is the concern of everyone else, where she sometimes hasn't even a room to herself, yet where the main interest of all centers around her sex life and capacity for bearing sons. . . . Detailed accounts of their experiences I have heard from the lips of Indian women themselves. Generally the first weeks and months had been passed by these brides in the husband's home in passionate homesickness, and intense feeling of forlornness, bewildered shyness, and agonizing self-consciousness. The child-wife never opened her mouth except to answer a direct question, and then twisted in discomfort if it had to be more than a mere yes or no. She was the first to rise in the morning, took the dust of her husband's feet, then waited to serve as she was bidden. When she sat in company with the other women during the day, and the footstep or voice of her husband sounded in some adjoining verandah or apartment, she had at once to retire into an inner room, and was sharply reprimanded if she lingered for a moment. Never was she permitted to see her husband in the daytime. Her meals she could take only after everyone else in the household had been served ; then she ate whatever was left. If unexpected guests came in, not infrequently there was nothing left. Yet she never dreamt of complaining. Though she had been taught to look forward to the special duty of cooking daily with her own hands some of her husband's food, her mother-in-law jealously retained that privilege for herself, and thus denied her that most valued comfort of serving. Not until the last member of the household had retired might she herself go to bed, no matter how tired or indisposed she might be. Only then did she come face to face with that stranger, her husband. Spellbound shyness, awed respect and sex consciousness prevented her from being able to talk to him more freely than to any of the others of the household. Moreover, having risen at dawn, she was by bedtime usually too tired and sleepy for anything more than submission to the inevitable sex act, an act into which her mind and soul hardly entered. For many months, husband and wife remained totally ignorant of each other's thoughts and feelings ; then she found there were but few of his thoughts

that she could share at any time, as his life outside the home was a sealed book to her. Yet in her loneliness and intimidation, the comfort and relaxation of sheer physical proximity to this one being in her strange surroundings brought it about that she began to cleave to her husband more than to anyone in the new household. Though she did not realize it, her husband came to take the place of a father in the little bride's feelings. As the insurmountable barrier of exaggerated respect and obedience had, in the past, put an unnatural distance between herself and her own father, she was apt to find this substitute-father more comforting, or at least more approachable, than her own parent had been.

But this comfort was hers only at the weary end of day. Even when her husband fell ill with fever, his mother would not permit her to come to his bedside. Worse still, she received black looks, as though she were guilty of having brought about this illness. . . . She had not privacy, even in menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth.

Not until she had herself borne a son did life grow bearable. The coming of her first son was like a great warm glow ; it won her immediate consideration and automatically gave her the right to hold up her head somewhat and find a voice. Pride in her son became the main consolation of her life ; the rearing of this son and attendance upon the slightest wish or need of her husband her supreme duty. . . . In the first instance two things were bound to happen. The greater a girl's innate but undeveloped capacity for individual choice, volition, and action—all tendencies sharply deprecated from her earliest days by those who surrounded her—the deeper the sublimation of these qualities and the more intensely did she finally throw herself into forms of expression of exactly opposite characteristics : unquestioning obedience, total abnegation of self-will, tireless service, lack of initiative. The greater her frustrated urge to outer freedom and independence, the fuller her escape into spiritual submission. So, the more finely endowed she was, the more was she found to turn into the very image of the ideal wife desired for ages by Hindu men—a Sita !

Thus far well and good. Such intensely introverted women would have been ideal mates for strongly extraverted men. But the majority of Indian men are themselves not normally extraverted men ; on the contrary, they are far more deeply introverted than those of any other race. Life in the joint family system, a long political subjection, and the fact that Indian men are sons of such unfree mothers as these, have deeply and inescapably marked the men themselves. The very subjugation they have successfully forced on their womenfolk had recoiled upon themselves.

The very fact that she (the wife) is likely to seek a father-substitute in him mitigates against normal matehood. Added to this is the excessive emphasis placed on her bearing a son, and this son's tremendous easing significance in her life ; in consequence the Indian mother is bound to put upon her son an abnormal amount of love,

and to expect from him emotional fulfilment ; an amplitude of life which should by rights come to her through matchood only, and not in motherhood. A hundred symptoms of this are noticeable even outwardly ; adolescent sons are, in exuberance of mutual affection and dependence, not infrequently fed by their mothers, hand to mouth, as if they were still babies ; I have seen a highly educated Hindu mother give her dry breast by the hour to her five-year-old son to still his fretful clamouring ; and it is not unusual for mothers to continue to nurse their sons for two and even three years on end. Thus the Hindu mother makes demands upon her son and renders services to him which forever warp his sense of proportion and frustrate his earliest attempts at a normal expansion and extension of affections toward the outer world, frustrates his "socialization". She shackles her son with unbreakable chains and leaves him mother-complexed beyond hope of release by conscious later efforts of his own. His instinctive infantile rebellion against her excessive demands or excessive showering of love upon him, against her exclusive emotional possessiveness, this wholesome rebellion is suppressed even long before he reaches adolescence. It becomes sublimated into its opposite—intense mother-goddess worship, that baleful ideal held before growing Hindu youth for ages past. Little do even the most educated Indians—blinded by the glamour of mystical interpretation—dream that this shining exaltation of motherhood, this worship of womanhood in the abstract, upon which they pride themselves inordinately, hides unplumbed subconscious depths of uncertainty, hatred, and fear. Little do they realize that this exaggerated worship of the "mother" is the very cause of their deep-seated contempt for "woman" ; of their unconquerable distrust of, yet hungry dependence upon them ; of the frustration of their desire to find fulfilment in matchood because they seek in the wife a mother instead of a mate ; of men's ultimate attempt to free themselves forever from all desires of the body.

It is time Hindu men analyzed the attitudes of themselves and their priests toward women. And the unconvincing exposition of their self-deluding idealization—which is in reality merely excuse and compensation—of the enthusiastic reiteration of how much more than any other race the Hindu reveres womankind. . . . It is despite and not because of Hindu men's conscious attitude towards womanhood that Hindu women, at their best, really rank among the world's most gracious, dignified, and winning examples of their sex. In their keeping lie slumbering radiant powers of unfathomed promise, for Hindu women possess qualities deepened and purified by a long suffering and service. . . .

Never has man dug a deeper pit for himself than did the Hindu when he worshipped goddesses and degraded woman, when he adored the mother and slighted the wife. His own hope of release from this self-forged frustration lies in purging the poison from the

holy sources of life ; in respecting sex, not in the abstract, but in the concrete form of the wife. Religious and philosophical speculation must give way to the true spirituality translated into action in daily life ; escape from desire translated into perfect attainment of the pure goal of desire ; unreal mother and dev-worship must make room for real and living respect of the female mate.<sup>7</sup>

This description of marriage for a young bride does not seem an exaggeration, particularly up through the early part of this century. These are the prevailing conditions against which the Ramabai Ranades and the Saroj Nalinis fought. These great Hindu women, like Mrs. Das, saw the degradation of women as a result of many centuries of Brahmin rule, of invasions, and of a general degeneration of the Vedic ideal. Mrs. Das, with the perception and training of an outsider added to her knowledge of Hindu life, goes further than they in analyzing the circular results of the mother-son complex, marriages that are often the unions of a woman subconsciously seeking a father and a man subconsciously seeking a mother, the woman transferring her repressions into her relationship with her son, and the man sublimating his desires in a worship of the goddess-mother.

Mrs. Das's analysis, to be sure, applies only to the large group which she sought to liberate, but not to many of the educated and progressive families. In India, as in all countries, there are many well-integrated families as well as the maladjusted ones, and in India there is a remarkable amount of marital content. This is partially because the pattern of submission has caused women to adjust and partially because early marriage integrates the two personalities. The traditional and strongly maintained emphasis on harmony, compromise, duty, and monogamy all result in family integration. Indian women are concerned with duties, not with rights. They are concerned with being wives and mothers—members of a group—not with being selves or individuals. Happiness, the full development of personality, as Hindus conceive it, come with a sense of belonging, with achieving goodness through unselfish service, with using feminine power in its own functional sphere. This philosophy unquestionably achieves much of its purpose.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Das makes a cogent analysis of the pattern

<sup>7</sup> Das, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-12

of male-female relationships, and perhaps points to the greatest single psychological maladjustment in Hindu society. To illustrate this point it is useful to show some of the manifestations of what may be called a mother cult, especially since these honoured and revered persons are constant images of idealism to the population.

### The Mother Cult

The great Sri Ramakrishna, nineteenth century scholar and saint, devotee of the Mother, is perhaps second to Gandhi in national stature and importance. Perhaps in his own sphere he would be accorded primary position. Today there are innumerable Ramakrishna missions and orders in India and in many other countries, and his name is spoken with awe and reverence. One might maintain, as one Indian graduate student did, that "Ramakrishna was a neurotic". Even assuming this to be true, it is important to note the direction and extent of the "neurosis," and to call attention to the wide social acceptance and, indeed, veneration of this saint.

Ramakrishna was born in a Bengal village in 1836, it is said of immaculate conception, Siva having caused his mother to conceive. As a boy he enjoyed adoring attention from women and girls, who apparently recognized his femininity. He had, for instance, a vivid dream in which he was reborn as a widow, a lover of the god Krishna. At the age of twenty he became a priest of Kali, the Great Goddess, the Divine Mother. Living alone at the temple with her, he was enthralled by the Queen of the World and of the Gods, who, dancing on the prone figure of Siva, held a sword and severed head in her two left arms, and beckoned with gifts with her two right. Kali, the Universal Mother—Destroyer and Creator—was to Ramakrishna "my Mother," the visible God who leads the elect to the invisible God.

And the priest was associated with all the intimate acts of the day. He dressed and undressed Her, he offered Her flowers and food. He was one of the attendants when the Queen arose and went to bed. How could his hands, his eyes, his heart be otherwise than gradually impregnated with Her flesh . . . . Passion for the Goddess consumed him. To touch Her, to embrace Her, to win one sign of life from Her, one look, one sign, one smile, became the sole object of his existence. He flung himself down in the wild jungle-like

part of the garden, meditating and praying. He tore off all his clothes, even to the sacred cord, which no Brahmin ever lays aside ; but love for the Mother had revealed to him that no man can contemplate God unless he has shed all his prejudices. Like a lost child in tears he besought the Mother to show Herself to him. Every day spent in vain effort increased his distraction, and he lost all control over himself. . . . He was at the limit of physical endurance.<sup>8</sup>

Ramakrishna, thus wracked with pain, thought of suicide—but when reaching for a sword saw the form of Kali gradually appear. Dizzy, reeling, almost suffocating, he became unconscious, floating in waves of joy for several days. On returning to consciousness he realized he was possessed by the Mother. She filled his being, and from then on was physically revealed to him. “From that moment his days and nights were passed in the continual presence of his Beloved. Their intercourse was uninterrupted like the flow of the river. Eventually he was identified with Her . . . .”<sup>9</sup>

Ramakrishna was married at twenty-three to a girl of thirteen. Far from desiring matehood, and seeing all women as Mother, he was willing to do his duty as a husband in the world of illusion. Great was his relief when the young bride herself suggested they remain chaste—and the marriage was thus a union of souls only. Saradomini became his immaculate companion and was called Holy Mother by their disciples. It was many years later that Ramakrishna recognized her as “woman,” when as a priest he placed her in the throne of Kali and honoured her with the ritual ceremonies of the adoration of womanhood.

Another woman became important to Ramakrishna, when he became associated with a *sannyasin* (holy woman), who declared she had long sought him. They established the relations of mother and son and of teacher and student, the woman caring for his body and instructing his mind for six years. Ramakrishna, by then seeing other forms of God, left her to live with an ascetic, a sexless being, to sink with him into the undifferentiated abstract as prelude to union with the Divine. He finally understood the Union, saying :

“When I think of the Supreme Being as active, creating, preserving,

<sup>8</sup> R. Rolland, *Prophets of the New India* (New York, Boni, 1930), p. 15

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

destroying, I call him Shakti, or Maya, or Prakriti (Energy, the soul of Nature, the power of the will to act in the Universe—in opposition to the silent and inactive Purusha), the personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The personal and the impersonal are the same Being, in the same way as milk and its whiteness, or the diamond and its lustre, or the serpent and its undulations. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahmin are one.”<sup>10</sup>

(The co-existence of opposites—of the active and inactive, of domination and submission, of good and evil—is basic in Hindu philosophy. By the time of the *Puranas*, the idea of a goddess being the *shakti*, or energy, of her husband took definite form in Hinduism. The god is retired, absolute, inconceivable; the goddess is a sort of emanation from him, bringing his power down to man, and is a much more approachable being than her lord. It was at this time that the sect of *Shakta* developed—a sect which worships Kali, which sees God as the Mother, and which considers all women as representatives of ideal Divine Motherhood.)

During his last illness, Ramakrishna thought only about his passionate love of the Mother, or Shakti, Sarasvati, Lakshmi. As he was dying the Mother was dwelling in him, and at death the priest of Kali cried three times the name of his life's Beloved—Kali, the Divine Mother.

Swami Vivekananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, was himself male-oriented, living much more a life of union with Siva than with the Mother. However, for a time he, too, was possessed by Kali, the Mother, and worshipped her not only in her peaceful aspect but also in her demoniacal. She was more often the mighty Destructress, the Terrible One, to whom he wrote the following poem, *Kali the Mother*.

The stars are blotted out,  
The clouds are covering clouds,  
It is darkness vibrant, sonant.  
In the roaring, whirling wind  
Are the souls of a million lunatics—  
Just loose from the prison house—  
Wrenching trees by the roots,  
Sweeping all from the path.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39

The sea has joined the fray,  
 And swirls up mountain-waves,  
 To reach the pitchy sky.  
 The flash of lurid light  
 Reveals on every side  
 A thousand, thousand shades  
 Of death, begrimed and black—  
 Scattering plagues and sorrows,  
 Dancing mad with joy. . . .

                  Come, Mother, come !  
 For terror is Thy name,  
 Death is in Thy Breath,  
 And every shaking step  
 Destroys a world for e'er.  
 Thou Time, the All-Destroyer !  
                   Come, O Mother, come !  
 Who dares misery love,  
 And hug the form of Death,  
 Dance in the Destruction's dance,  
 To him the Mother comes.<sup>11</sup>

Swami Vivekananda apparently saw the Mother as Evil, Terror, Sorrow, and Annihilation more than as Sweetness and Joy. He commented on how fools worship her mercy, only to find her terror. He himself felt that only by worshipping the Terrible can the Terrible be overcome, and saw the Mother's curse as doing good by burning pride, selfishness, and desire into ashes. At the close of his life, as he felt possessed by Death, he heard only the Mother's voice, and died singing his own hymn to Kali.

Krishnalal Shridharani is not in the same category of *swami* and saint as the above two, but he is one of modern India's best interpreters. He speaks, too, of the Mother :

In the beginning, according to Indian mythology, was Shakti, and Shakti, which means energy, has in Sanskrit a feminine gender. The cosmos was her creation, her child. . . . And what could be nobler than to see the Creator as a Mother? It is the mother, not the father, who comes to the mind first whenever the word "creation" is mentioned. Woman's eternal energy, her natural ability to give and to feed life, to add cell to cell, make man look relatively unimportant to the scheme of things. . . . One can be sure of one's mother if not of one's father ; and if this is true on earth, it may also be true of the cosmos.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344

The most meaningful word the Hindus have for woman is "mata," or "mother". Philosophers and poets alike have believed "mother love" to be the ideal love, the real love, a love utterly unselfish and boundless. From conception to death, she intuitively and naturally believes in giving with no thought of return; that is why mother love is also described in India as *avyaj prem*, or disinterested love. All other loves, the loves of the betrothed, of married couples, or friends, of fathers for their sons, of brothers and sisters, are based on reciprocity, and are forms of friendship; mother love alone can be one-sided. . . . Consequently, it seems to me that if God is Love, He should be conceived of as Mother and not Father. . . . There was a time in my youth when I made myself sick with love of God. . . . I . . . concentrated on the face of my mother, believing that if God was, He must be a supreme image of my mother's disinterested love. . . .

It is motherhood more than womanhood, then, that the Hindus glorify. . . . An Indian artist will prefer to paint a picture of a woman with a child at her breast. . . . Paying greater honour to motherhood than to womanhood implies emphasis on creation rather than on recreation. Accordingly, marriage becomes more work than play. . . . The Indian marriage still centres around the progeny.<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi was married at thirteen to a girl he had never seen. In his autobiography he speaks candidly of the experience. "I do not think it meant to me anything more than the prospects of good clothes to wear, drum beating, marriage processions, rich dinners, and a strange girl to play with." After describing the ceremonies, he goes on: "My brother's wife had thoroughly coached me about my behaviour on the first night. I do not know who had coached my wife. I have never asked her about it, nor am I inclined to do so now. . . . How was I to talk to her, and what was I to say? The coaching could not carry me far. But no coaching is really necessary in such matters. The impressions of the former birth are potent enough to make all coaching superfluous." For a long time the couple lived according to orthodox Hinduism, the husband not permitted to see his wife during the daytime. But the wife became Gandhi's companion in the prison days of South Africa, and she accompanied him on the famous salt marches in India. Gandhi had long since made a vow of continence, and his wife was to him as his mother. He remained a vegetarian all his life out of reverence for his own mother, to whom he had made a vow, and the following discussion of the Gita, which Gandhi

<sup>12</sup> Krishn Lal Shridharani, *My India, My America* (New York, Duell, Sloan & Pearce, Inc., copyright, 1941, by Krishn Lal Shridharani), pp. 198-200

published in the August 24, 1939, *Harijan*, shows his feeling about the Mother: "Today the Gita is not only my Bible or my Koran; it is more than that—it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago; but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress I seek refuge in her bosom."<sup>13</sup>

Swami Abhedananda gives us the following daily Hindu prayer: "O Mother Divine, Thou art beyond the reach of our praises. Thou pervadest every particle of the universe; all knowledge proceeds from Thee, O Infinite source of wisdom! Thou dwellest in every feminine form, and all women are Thy living representatives upon earth."<sup>14</sup>

An Indian scholar, visiting this country in 1951, explained the place of woman in relationship to Hindu philosophy. "We are born for certain reasons, we live, we die. It is all part of a system of logic. Women are trained by their mothers to four functions: first, they are the pillar of the home, supporting all the rest. How they do that is their business, their duty. Second, they are the tree, from which branches will grow. How they do this is their duty. Third, they must give their children the meaning of their heritage. They must train their daughters to carry on these same four functions, and they must help their sons 'to travel toward the mountains'. That means to show them they are a part of life's continuity, futurity, depth of time. They must tell them the legends and the stories. Men have learned all these things from their mothers and grandmothers, not from their fathers. Fourth, they must perform the religious duties daily, in the home, at the temple. Women are an essential part of all the ceremonies — birth, death, marriage, etc. The men really know nothing about them." The same Hindu scholar then went on to explain that fewer women are now encouraged to have higher education or to travel abroad. "These things have meant that women are losing their function. Modern life is an attack on the Hindu philosophy of life and the result is chaos. Hindu women must be the creative mothers in the way we have always had them."

<sup>13</sup> Vincent Sheean, *Lead Kindly Light* (New York, Random House, Inc., 1949), pp. 46, 61-2, 68, 108

<sup>14</sup> Swami Abhedananda, *India and Her People* (San Francisco, Vedanta Society, 1902), p. 285

## The Psychology of Motherhood

Helene Deutsch, differentiating between "motherhood" and "motherliness", expands on the latter concept, saying, "In the motherly woman the narcissistic wish to be loved, so typical of the feminine woman, is metamorphosed; it is transferred from the ego to the child or his substitute, but the narcissistic elements are preserved. The masochistic components of motherliness manifest themselves in the mother's readiness for self-sacrifice, but — in contrast to the attitude of the feminine woman — without demand for any obvious return on the part of the object, *i.e.*, the child."<sup>15</sup> We have here, it would seem, a psychological explanation of Shridharani's "disinterested love". And the following explains similarly "tenderness": "Maternal love is the direct affective expression of the positive relationship to the child (or his substitute). Its chief characteristic is 'tenderness'. All the aggression and sexual sensuality in the woman's personality are suppressed and diverted by this central emotional expression of motherliness."<sup>16</sup>

Helene Deutsch goes on to comment on the co-existence of opposites — natural sexuality and motherliness. "Either component may completely dominate the conscious life while the other remains hidden in the unconscious." (It seems apparent that in India motherliness is given precedence.) "In some women motherliness so completely fills the emotional life that the boundary between the maternal and all other emotions disappears. In such cases sexuality is not differentiated from motherliness, for the sexuality of these women... is included in their motherliness."<sup>17</sup>

In all variations of mother, she says, there are two types. "One type is the woman who awakens to a new life through her child without having the feeling of a loss. Such a woman develops her charm and beauty fully only after her first child is born. The other type is the woman who from the first feels a kind of depersonalization in her relation to her child. The first type expands her ego through the child, the second feels restricted and impoverished."<sup>18</sup> There is little doubt that Hindu

<sup>15</sup> Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women*, Vol. II (New York, Grune & Stratton, 1944), pp. 17-18

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 37

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

mothers are in general of the first type, as they really only begin to exist as persons when they are mothers. But do they face the trauma, then, of the "severing of the psychological cord?" We can assume, in the first place, that in a Hindu joint family, where the son brings his bride to his own house and where the bride is subservient to the mother-in-law, that this loss is minimized. It probably is less severe than in our own culture even when the son lives in his own household, as the Hindu family still generally observes the traditional patterns of authority and family solidarity. According to Helene Deutsch, one way to lessen this shock is a strengthened interest in social, intellectual, and professional tasks — a path not yet open to many Hindu women. But "the path traced by nature is the most successful ; having many children is the best protection against the tragic loss."<sup>10</sup> Hindu mothers, in their large families, thus protect themselves unconsciously from too severe a loss. Probably most important is the fact that Hindus do not think of people as personal possessions, do not think of themselves as owners of others.

In sum, the Hindu mother is the epitome of the Hindu woman. She has realized herself, personally and socially. She both suffers and gains as a result of the Mother-goddess worship. She suffers in that the physical mother is often slighted in favour of the spiritual mother ; she gains in that the mother ideology is so strong that it serves to pull upward on the social practices.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331

## *Special Problems*

IT IS HELPFUL to pull together some of the special problems that have arisen in the descriptive material given by the informants. In this chapter there will be a brief discussion of the problems connected with the single woman, the older woman in the modern family unit, the widow, and the deviant, as well as the problems related to divorce, mixed marriages, and friendships in a foreign country. Most of these problems are related to the modern age and its impact on traditional patterns.

### **The Single Woman**

It is impossible to discuss the single woman except in relation to education and the professions, as it is virtually only through them that the single woman exists in India today. The reaction of all the informants, when first asked about single women, was that "there are no single women," though all soon admitted that this is not strictly true, particularly in the cities and among the highly educated.\* "There are really none in the villages," was the general consensus.\* The single women that do exist are highly qualified women in careers, unable because of their positions, education, or age to find husbands older and more qualified. It is generally true that single women getting on in years above twenty, in the villages, are not considered "decent" morally, hence much social pressure is exerted to have them married. But this condemnation on the part of society does not hold for the college professors, doctors, etc., who are respected members of society.\*

"These single, highly educated women are not suspected of immorality, but their lives are hard. The community interprets everything from a different point of view in their case. They don't have the freedom of either the young unmarried girls or of the older married women. They can't go out with any men. Everything they do is misunderstood. Small communities are particularly severe on young teachers. They are not sympathetic.... Single women can always find jobs, of course, but to lead such a life — even though it brings economic independence, which many women want — is an emotional strain. A single woman finds it very difficult to adjust herself to the expectations of society."<sup>c</sup> "Single women are curiosities, being wedded to their careers. A single woman is respected all right, but if a man is seen coming from her compound at night, God help her!"<sup>B</sup> "There are very few single women, and they are treated as freaks. Society pities them. It is a pity to see anyone unmarried."<sup>x</sup>

"There always has been a tradition for extraordinary single women," Z pointed out, referring to the female mystics and teachers. "But these are unusual and not the single women that are in difficulty. There has always been much public criticism all over India of the 'pioneer girls' (progressives working for social reconstruction). Every little thing they do is criticized. Even to talk to a man means marrying him or running away with him. But the single educated woman, as an existing fact, has been socially accepted since World War II. Things have absolutely changed, because sixty thousand girls left their homes to join the armed forces. There was much criticisms of that. Bombay is more advanced, the Central Provinces less so, and the Punjab is very rural-minded. I know for a fact that colleges after the war refused to take the WACI's (Women's Auxiliary Corps, India) back into college. They said, 'These girls have gone out, have been individualized, have been to dances — and they will want this kind of social life in college, in great contradiction to the kind of social life the other girls have'. So they set up separate institutions for the rehabilitated WACI's, because society was not prepared to accept them. These girls had done nothing wrong, but they had left the conventional pattern."

F commented that there are an increasing number of single women in career work. "The majority of Indian women who have chosen careers instead of marriage have done so because they are

physically less attractive than others. It is the lesser of two evils, because unmarried women can't go out and have their fun — as men can. You might as well work at a career. It is quite different from the United States, where there are many beautiful, attractive women that are single from choice — a condition you won't find in India. Nationalism is another reason, also, why women choose careers. Women have thought more in terms of nationalism than men, and they have a great sense of service for their country. However, this does not necessarily prevent marriage. Economic competition is a third reason. It is definitely beginning, especially in university teaching and the medical field. Many single women are supporting their families."

It is clear from the above statements that there is difficulty, in having careers, marriage still being the only socially acceptable status for women. India needs many elementary and secondary teachers, many nurses, for instance. Is there difficulty in getting girls to go into these needed professions? *Y* pointed out that a great many girls teach after getting married, and although most stop teaching when they have children, maternity leave is customary. (In fact, it was taken for granted, and never became an issue.) She said that being trained to teach increases marriage chances. *C* spoke in the same vein, but enlarged on the difficulties. "Girls can continue teaching after marriage, and many do because of economic necessity. But it is very hard to manage both home and work, and most can't do it." "There are an increasing number of married teachers," *F* agreed, "but it depends on the emphasis. Many families tolerate professional training but discourage it if the emphasis is on the career." There was consensus that a career should never interfere with marriage and home.\* *C* felt that there had been sufficient difficulty over this conflict by now so that many families now discourage training for teaching. *Y* saw the perfect solution to the teacher shortage problem in the many widows, who could be trained and who could serve usefully in that capacity. *A* commented on the plight of teachers. "There is a stigma against the schoolteacher type. She is a Christian, has a poor background, wears glasses, and is often a spinster. They are a pathetic group — and yet they really do so much for India."

The attitude of society is much sharper in the case of nurses. *F*, who studied nursing in this country and who is returning to

India in the field of nursing education, said, "Nursing is socially unacceptable and a real hindrance to marriage. I don't think any family will want me as a member. (Though *F* admits she intends to marry if she can find a 'progressive man who will understand'.) Nurses, because of certain aspects of their work—such as handling bedpans—are like 'untouchables'. Also, they are 'indecent', because they go out for night work and so on. Families definitely discourage nursing. Doctors are different; they are so highly qualified they are more or less above suspicion." *C* said that nursing is a "below-dignity profession" and that no one wants to marry a nurse.

*A* gave a slightly different aspect of the problems of the single woman. "There is a stigma against a woman's being educated to a higher status than the husband. So nowadays many girls who don't get men go on studying, even to M.A.s. They don't really want careers, for that is competing with men, but they can't find men more highly qualified than they are. So there is an increasing number of women over twenty-three that are remaining unmarried. These girls do want to work, but their parents are greatly against their earning money—unless for a *lot* of money—as that is degrading. College or university teaching is about the only career for such women, and there are so many qualified men in that field, who, of course, get the first chance. Many women thus don't get jobs."

There is a distinct trend against higher education for women, since it has brought problems and dislocations, and several of the informants took particular pains to explain this recent change in attitude. "Highly educated girls are beginning not to get married, so parents today want their daughters to marry young and avoid this trouble. It is a new trend of thought. Twenty years ago people were in favour of highly educated girls, and men wanted to marry them. But in the last ten years men don't want wives with too much education. They want them educated only up to Matriculation, for then the girl is submissive and her personality has not been moulded. A husband wants to mould his wife's personality. Men don't want dominant women."<sup>c</sup> "It is true there is a recent trend against educated women. They can't find husbands of greater status. Families encourage less education now. Husbands want matriculated wives but not college-educated wives. Just ask even the men here (in International House). None of

them want wives with much education. College-educated wives are too independent.”<sup>B</sup>

There is little doubt that education is bringing different values regarding parent-planned marriage, caste observance in marriage, birth control, etc., in ways that are in contradiction to the old patterns. *A* said, “Education brings a sense of immorality in marrying one you don’t know”. She was not implying however, that she was in favour of marrying a person her family did not approve. “Choosing one’s own mate is coming in slowly; in another generation there will be a big difference. We educated women will not demand caste observance, for instance, in our children’s marriages. And we all want to do something about birth control and social programmes. There is a big difference in what we students of the younger generation think from what our mothers think.”

This difference in the educated groups is marked. *Y*, whose mother longs for her to get married and settle down, said that her mother nevertheless approves of her higher education, even to a doctorate, “if that is what you want,” though at the cost of making marriage difficult and perhaps impossible. But it is significant that even among the educated groups there is the counter-move against the breaking of the patterns. Freedom is exciting, but not at the cost of social acceptance. And in the rural areas there has been virtually no change at all from the traditional customs.\*

### The Older Woman in the Modern Family Unit

*C* wrote in a paper on “Family Life” an intimate and personal account of her mother-in-law, which seems pertinent to this discussion of special problems. At this period in India there are a number of older women who themselves were not trained to professional work of any kind, but who encouraged their children to a more independent life, and hence in their old age live lives of loneliness. *F*, in discussing this problem, stated rather indignantly that no older women ought to feel lonely, with so much social work being available to them—even to piecework in the home for those unwilling to leave the home. Undoubtedly many older women are meeting the problem in this way, but it seems probable that *C*’s mother-in-law may be typical of many—nurtured in one pattern, living in another.

## THE OLD MEMBER IN THE FAMILY

In our culture we are very considerate and modest to them (older members of the family). I had no father-in-law ; my mother-in-law, her three sons and one daughter were all staying together, and I was the addition to their family. All the members of the family were no longer children, and everybody was busy with his studies or work. . . . I was also in the college and thus busy too. Sometimes when I returned early from the college nobody was at home, and I used to find my mother-in-law sitting lonely in the home. I was always thinking that she was feeling lonely. Though she was in her home with her own children, she was somewhat lonely. She was a conservative lady and was not able to read novels or enjoy social functions. She used to read religious books. But she was not satisfied with it. Sometimes I found her standing in the window. I always used to ask myself why she was feeling so. . . . I went to her and asked her, "Mummy, are you not feeling well? I find you sometimes very depressed and lonely. What's wrong with you? Is anybody not behaving properly?"

She said, "No, dear, you are all good. I am very glad that my children are happy. I know all of you love me very dearly. But, nowadays, I sometimes feel that what is the use of my living now. All my children are grown up now. They are all intelligent. They are all independent. They are in no way dependent upon my help. I do not want to blame them, because I was training them to be independent. They are able to think themselves and they can make decisions or do anything they like. They love me, but they do not want my advice or help now. I know that they should not depend upon anybody's advice. Everybody has his field of interest. My interest is to see everybody happy. I know now that they are all happy. I am no longer useful to them. When I was young my husband was with me and used to ask me to go out with him. But at that time I was so busy with my young children that I hardly found any time to go with him. All my children are now attached to their wives and children. I do not think it to be wrong. I of course love all of them. But still sometimes I feel that I am leading an empty life. I know that I am not an unwanted person. I could not help feeling lonely, when you all are busy with your own affairs. My child, you should not take all this to heart. I am not unhappy. I am just telling you as to why I sometimes feel lonely. When I was young I thought that I must train my children ; I must give them the best education. To make them independent individuals was my duty. I have fulfilled all my duties now. I have nothing to do in the home. I am happy with your daughter and my children."

## Widowhood

There is probably no aspect of womanhood that has received more sympathy than that of widowhood in India, and the majority of Indian reformers, men and women, have worked tirelessly for an amelioration of their lot. The emphasis has sometimes been on allowing their remarriage, sometimes on training them for positions and for social acceptance. Though the former is done, especially in certain areas, the general emphasis of the informants was on the latter, because the insistence on virginity in a wife, largely precludes the possibility of remarriage, law or no law. "Even educated men don't want to marry a widow."<sup>x</sup> "Men of forty who are remarrying very much like to marry virgins of about twenty."<sup>c</sup> As mentioned earlier, Y saw teaching as the perfect solution for widows, "since there is no chance of their remarrying anyway".<sup>y</sup>

The practice of *sati* or *suttee* (widow-burning), which Coomaraswamy insists "was not man-made, nor imposed by men on women," was prohibited by law in 1829, partly as the result of British dominance but largely as the result of the reforming zeal of Ram Mohun Roy of Bengal.<sup>1</sup> It is a practice largely condemned by Indian society, but not wholly so, considering the philosophical elements behind the idea — that it is a privilege and honour, and the only sure way to rejoin one's husband in the next life. The writer has heard an Indian woman say, "And they (the British) took that privilege from us too," a sentiment that has meaning when understood in the context of reincarnation and in that of the essential oneness of husband and wife. To quote Coomaraswamy again, *sati*, the root meaning of which is "essential being," refers to "she who refuses to live when her husband is dead. . . . It is the last proof of the perfect unity of body and soul, devotion beyond the grave. . . . We differ in thinking of our suttees not with pity, but with understanding, respect, and love. . . . We take pride in them." But this is not to say Coomaraswamy advocated the practice. "We do not object to dying for an idea, as suttees and patriots have died, but we see that there may be other and greater ideas we can better serve by living for them."<sup>2</sup>

The practice, in any case, is now obsolete, and we see that just

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva*, p. 91

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

as adolescence was made more difficult because of a change in marriage age for girls, so widowhood became a period of suffering not compatible with the Hindu patterned and functional development and use of the human being. A woman who is not either becoming a woman or functioning as one has no place as yet in the society. A widow, who is "sexless," must become something other than a woman. Traditionally, according to Mrs. Das, widows could not remarry, had to renounce their sex, could not pronounce the name of another man, and had to live ascetically on fruits, roots, and flowers. They had their hair cut, were stripped of jewellery, slept on hard surfaces, had one meal a day, and had a twenty-four-hour fast twice a month. Their presence was unlucky and accursed; they were not allowed to join any feasts or merrymaking, and they became the unpaid drudge. They were easy prey to male relatives, and sometimes escaped by prostitution, suicide, or pilgrimages.<sup>3</sup>

This hard treatment has been greatly modified, although there still exist many widows suffering much of the above-described treatment. "A widow has no place in society. In the olden days she was a physical *sati*; now she is a psychological *sati*. Even today in modern families she is excluded from festivities. The widow returns to her husband's house, where she has position, or to her parent's house, where she is a burden and is treated as a servant. She gets some sympathy, but not much, and she is often considered the cause of her husband's death. Her security was bound up in her husband, and she is not prepared to live an independent life. It is impossible for her to train for an independent life while her husband is alive. She dares not, during his life, bring up the question of his mortality. 'You're thinking of my death,' he will say. She does, as a widow, get the traditional protection accorded to Indian women. Everyone comes to her rescue, but she will have no status or prestige, and she can't have a separate establishment."<sup>B</sup> "Widowhood is certainly an unhappy state," *F* agreed. "The widow remarriage taboo is a lot of bunk. It is different in different areas. And there is no feeling that the husband's death is her fault, but it may be considered that she has to suffer, on her own account, because of her last life."<sup>F</sup> "Widowhood is different in different families, widows being respectable in some families and ill-treated in others."<sup>Z</sup> "Widows

<sup>3</sup> Frieda M. Das, *Purdah, the Status of Indian Women*, pp. 34, 77

are a difficult problem. But at least they have the sympathy of society, as divorced women could not. We all feel that we must help widows."<sup>c</sup>

### Divorce

Hindu women have not had any national provision for divorce, though there are local areas, such as Bombay, that have permitted it in recent years. It is significant that the proposed Hindu Code Bill permitting divorce is not the result of great pressure concerning the necessity of a divorce bill, but is the result of the women's movement and insistence on equal rights. *D* wrote in a paper (quoting the Government of India Information Services) :

The bill is designed to enforce by law monogamy (which is now not customary), to permit divorce in certain circumstances (adultery and seven years' desertion), and to confer on a daughter the right to share her father's property equally with her brother. It also seeks to give recognition to marriages and adoptions outside of castes. (*D* went on to point out that the provision for divorce will almost never be used.) Faithfulness in marriage is expected by the whole Indian society, whether by Moslems and Christians who have the right of divorce, or Hindus who have no right. A Moslem or Christian woman divorces her husband only in cases of extreme brutality or callousness. It is India's way of thinking, India's philosophy. The impact of Western education has made little difference. With the coming of the Hindu Code Bill into force the set-up of the whole Indian society will be one. During the transition we may come across some undesirable tendencies, but India is going ahead with full confidence that her way of life will triumph in the end. In the words of our Law Minister, B. H. Ambedkhar, "The bill is no revolutionary measure, not even a radical measure. It calls for nothing more than repairing those parts of the Hindu system which have almost become dilapidated."

Certainly the proposed bill has scarcely caused a ripple about the divorce measure. The heated controversy, still preventing passage of the bill, is focussed on the property rights of women and the attendant impact on the Hindu joint family, which has been the basis of Hindu society. Without exception the informants expressed their great distaste for the divorce customs of the United States. "Nobody approves of divorce. There still is a social stigma attached to it."<sup>z</sup> "Divorce is almost unknown. There is such a stigma with it that one would prefer suicide. It

is found only in Westernized women, and others would not let their children play with their children." <sup>A</sup> *B*, the only "Westernized woman" (and the only deviant) in the group of informants, said, "It is possible to get a divorce, but it just is not done except in perhaps the upper 5 per cent and the lower 5 per cent. The lower classes just take another wife." We recall *X*'s saying that some educated girls are "blind". "They fight about equal rights and divorce, without awareness of the deep social implications. Some of these modern women do not realize what they are doing. Divorce is necessary in a *few* cases, but it is a dangerous thing. Women aren't qualified to work, and now they wouldn't even have social acceptance. It should be *very* difficult to get a divorce. This divorce business should wait. Most marriages work out." <sup>x</sup>

*B*'s own problem is pertinent to this discussion, as she frankly admits incompatibility with her husband. She does not anticipate getting a divorce, however, "for the sake of my family, especially my children. I don't want my son or daughter to be sneered at, to be told their mother is an adulteress." She went on to emphasize the aspect of adultery in divorce, deploring the double standard in operation. "The wife must always be faithful, but the husband is not expected to be. What is good for a man is not good for a woman. He can have affairs and be respected, but she can't, as she can't leave him, not being economically independent. If she fights it out in court she gets only twenty-five rupees a month, and she can't live on that."

*B* was the only one of the informants, however, who connected adultery with divorce. The others clearly showed their understanding of conditions impossible of acceptance — divorce being the solution in these rare cases — but could not imagine any Indian woman's wanting to marry another man. Dissolution of marriage in a few cases, yes, but remarriage, never! Clearly the whole subject was painful to the informants, and yet they admitted it is a problem that India must face. *C* reluctantly pointed out that in Bombay twenty-five hundred cases were filed as soon as the law permitted divorce. "We did not know there was so much need." <sup>c</sup>

### Mixed Marriages

It has been repeatedly noted in many instances in the previous material that Hindu marriages are supposed to be within the same

caste, a practice stemming from the earliest days of caste observance, when the conquerors tried to prevent further mixing with the "inferior" conquered. Modern circumstances have, of course, brought a good many mixed marriages — with ensuing problems, as one would expect. It is impossible to treat this subject fully in this study, but we will include the accounts of three mixed marriages, given by *C*, *Y* and *B*.

"The inter-caste marriage is not commonly accepted by society," *C* wrote in a paper. "And when different cultures are involved, the two ways of living are also different." She went on to describe the marriage of a Hindu man and French woman.

The people around them are not willing to accept them as they are. Her relatives tell her that she must force her husband to accept her religion, and his relatives tell him that he must convert her to Hinduism. The couple doesn't let this influence them, but the husband's parents are never willing to stay with them. They are conservative and dislike their son's marriage. Of course the same is the case with the wife's parents. No relatives are willing to stay with them (a tragic situation in India). The wife never tells her husband to invite any guest to stay with them. According to our culture the Indian man or woman likes to entertain their guests at home. If the Westerners prefer to entertain their guests outside the home, we like to entertain them inside the home. The husband always likes to have guests enjoying his hospitality, but she never encourages him. He is conscious that she has left her home, her parents, her country, and has come far away from her country for his sake only. So he thinks that to make her happy is his moral responsibility. She is also conscious that he had to sacrifice everything (family and social approval) for her, so she must make him happy. This consciousness makes their life happy. The urge for compromise makes their life a life without conflicts. But society is always very critical; in such cases the couple must prove that the power of love and compromise is greater than the effects of religion and culture.

*Y* told of the marriage of a Sikh girl to a Moslem man. Because of the Partition riots his life was in danger in India, and he had to flee to Pakistan. But the wife was miserable and saw no future without her husband. She went to Pakistan, where her own life was in danger, and where she had to take refuge in *Y*'s home. None of the relatives were sympathetic to the marriage, and neither husband nor wife was safe in the home of the other.

*B*'s younger sister married an Anglo-Indian.

She was brought up by her aunts and given no sex education, allowed no male companionship. She became very movie-hero-struck and fell in love with Ronald Colman. A violinist, she sat in an orchestra near a man who resembled her hero—but he was an Anglo-Indian, anathema to both British and Indian groups. She knew there was no way to introduce him to her family. When she was back in school she managed to go and sleep with him, and became pregnant without realizing what was happening. We had to tell her she was pregnant. Father's first reaction was great anger, and then he said, "I wish she were a Brahmin widow". My sister and the man were married before the child was born. She suffered hell—she still does—because she has an Anglo-Indian name, though she and her husband are much in love and are happy together. They are seriously considering changing their name, for the sake of the children. This sort of thing affects the whole family. My aunt said to me, for instance, "We cannot arrange a suitable marriage for you".

### The Deviant

We have seen from the contributions of *B* many aspects of a deviant, and it seems necessary here only to add several points from her presentation of the problems involved in rebelling against the conventional patterns. In the first place, it seems reasonable to deduce from the descriptive material given by the informants that even to be a deviant is almost unthinkable. It could happen only in the upper social strata, which in the larger cities is considerably Westernized, especially among some of the wealthy economic groups. *B*, here in the United States, according to some remarks, is not respected by her own Indian group. She wears American-style slacks and shirts some of the time (whereas the Indian style pajama would be acceptable). She smokes and is very free with men and with her conversation. *B* is aware of this and also of her relationship to her husband's family in India. "My mother-in-law was constantly embarrassed by my role, although she likes me as a person. Once she scolded me for being with a man and smoking—she had not noticed that my husband was standing behind me. She said it would have been better if her son had married a Western woman, for then one could understand such behaviour. I did not tell her my husband was there, however, as that would have caused the mother to doubt her son. And I never smoked in her presence, as I knew it displeased her." *B* described, too, some of her difficulties with

her husband. "My husband didn't want me to have an education higher than his own, and he has fought the idea from the beginning. But I have an independent income, and he had to let me. We have a joint bank account, in which we have our securities. When he wants money he merely sends me a check for me to sign. But when I want money I have to ask him for it." She mentioned again, as before, that her role to him had changed when she had a son. "I am now not his wife — but the mother of his son. And last time when I went home I found that he was setting the children against me. He has told them that their mother doesn't care about them. My son, now twelve, wouldn't kiss me. He considers himself a man — and won't touch a woman."

G, who has lived away from India a good deal, is a potential deviant, although she has expressed herself in favour of parent-planned marriage. She became engaged to an Indian in the United States, but broke up with him because she could not accept the idea of obedience to a husband. She was, moreover, distressed over his relationship with his parents. "This man thought only of his parents. He would do anything to make them happy, and of course intended to live with them. He wanted to get a wife for their sake, but he would have remained a bachelor if that pleased them more. He would not have married an American, as that would have made them unhappy." G was very disturbed over this engagement, as an Indian knowing it should be binding, but with the advice and help of an American professor she finally broke it off. She then became engaged to an American. He hoped she would stay in America and become Westernized, even to wearing American clothes. This attitude hurt her, as she wanted to remain Indian and to go back and work for India. Then the American said he would go to India and become Indian, and only army service prevented him in this plan. G, however, on reflection, now thinks it a hopeless case, having come to see that he would not be happy in India. She has remembered many ways in which he does not like Indian culture — Indian music, for instance. So G has returned to India quite convinced that parent-planned marriage is best, though still insisting that she will never be obedient to a husband. "Sometimes I am almost sorry I have been exposed to any ideas other than pure Indian ones. It has made it difficult for me to fit in."

**Friendships in a Foreign Country**

G, in discussing her experiences in being engaged first to an Indian and then to an American, told of a basic difficulty involved in "choosing your own mate". "Indian men," she said, "are like masks. They don't ever reveal their characters except to members of the family. So that I did not know the true character of this Indian until after I was promised to him. Then he slowly revealed himself — and I felt trapped." As mentioned above, she did break off her engagement to him. "Americans," she went on, "reveal themselves right away. I got used to that, and I like it. So it is very difficult for me now to get along with Indian men. I like the American point of view toward parents, too. Of not feeling a sense of duty toward the parents. Of wanting 'just us two' to live together, with no one to interfere."

B explained that Indian boys in America don't dare go with Indian girls because they are afraid they will be trapped. To be with an Indian girl more than a few times, even casually, "means they can't escape. Even if they should go back to India, anyone could find them." This is unofficial breach of promise, just as binding socially as a court case.

B also explained a difficulty she has encountered with Indian men here. On several occasions when she has dressed up for a party she has been criticized by Indian men for doing so. "Why are you dressed up? Your husband isn't here." The Indian attitude of thinking a woman should be dressed in her best only for her husband often prevails, and there is sometimes distrust of those Indian women who do it.<sup>B</sup>

A said that "Indian boys take to new ways sooner than girls. They Westernize very fast, and they like American girls because they think they can mould them. Indian girls do Westernize, too fast even, but less than the boys. They wear lipstick, high heels, long fingernails. They cut their hair, and some even smoke. But they rarely go with American men. They don't understand American humour, for one thing. And when the American men are having fun with them they don't know it." But A admitted that the difficulties of Indian men and women in having normal social contact in a foreign country are so great that it is often easier to go with an American, with whom a date isn't binding. "It is very hard for an Indian girl to fall in love with an Indian boy in America.

He touches American girls, and one loses respect for him."<sup>A</sup>

C commented, too, on the block between Indian boys and girls in this country. "They can't be natural, so there is a block. Too much is expected of Indian girls. They can't do the things that American girls do. I don't like to touch boys' hands. And any married woman here doesn't want her husband to dance with others or to touch them." Z has seen many Indian men and girls in the United States and in England. She commented that the Indian men, during the war, away from home, were "all neurotics and inhibited. Indian boys know where they stand with American and English women. In kissing, for instance. But Indian women would not like to go that far. Indian girls have done a lot of discussing on this question. Indian girls in England felt the Indian boys were having a good time, but that the girls were being left out of things. In England and America, Indian girls are deprived of much social life. It's mostly because of the taboo on touching. Indian girls rarely dance, and if they do they make sure it is not more than once with each person. The point is that Indian girls' interest in men is on them as *men* and not as friends. A girl's first reaction when she is with a man is that she can't see him again, because that would mean marriage."

F said, with great feeling, "Why don't these (Indian) men treat me as they do American girls? Mr. X here in International House doesn't want Indian girls to become Westernized, and yet he goes around the lobby hugging other girls. But he won't touch me, and if I threw my arms around him he wouldn't respect me. To him I'm a symbol of mother or sister." She went on to explain the difficulty over touching. "The other day I told him to come and sit down beside me. He said, 'Wait a minute' and went to get a big blotter to put in between us as he sat down. I laughed and said, 'What's that for?' and he said, 'Insulation'. He had to show me that he knew he shouldn't touch me. He really is very considerate. He has taught me to dance, for instance. He taught me painstakingly, and knew it was important to me not to make a fool of myself on the public dance floor. He told me I was doing well, knowing I would like to be told that. Then at the dance he would have been hurt if I had had to sit any dances out. He was very protective and got me partners, whereas an American might have danced with me himself most of the time. He also told me the things to do if a man got fresh. He knew I wouldn't know. This

question of not touching is a real problem on dates, for the man won't take your arm in crossing streets. Women adjust to different situations more quickly than men. Indian men get these same Western values, but they won't accord them to Indian women. I think Indian men have much to lose and Indian women much to gain in Western values. Indian men like the companionship of American women, because American women are free and easy and don't make issues of things. I probably would like to marry a man who is a good companion, but not in a way to hurt his ego, emphasizing in public that I had a hold over this man. Indian women will never hurt the egos of men, even in politics. Indian men, wouldn't ever want to be corrected, or even given information, in public. I remember, for instance, a Ph.D. who knew nothing about Tagore. At a dinner party I made the mistake of telling him some things about Tagore, and he didn't like it. This makes it a problem for women in executive positions, but they have to learn to give orders in the right way. They can only learn from India in this respect."

These, then, are some of the problems involved in modern Indian womanhood. Except for widowhood, they are related to changing times and the impact of Western customs and values. It must be remembered that they are relatively rare problems in the whole population, being much more intimately connected with the progressive, urban, and educated groups. The informants did not minimize the difficulties of transition, but they all insisted they must be worked out in an Indian solution.

## 10

# Concept of Self

IN THIS FINAL chapter it will be shown that the concept of self as perceived by the informants, is strongly related to groups, primarily to the family. This is revealed in many statements, especially in some given in answer to "psychological interview" questions. Finally, there will be a summary of the implications of the concept of womanhood in India.

### The Identification of Self with the Family

Traditionally Indian women have, in special cases, experienced the four stages of life — studentship, family life, community service, and religious retirement — a cycle intended to allow the full development of the personality. There have been women who have been great teachers, spiritual leaders, sages, but they have been rare, and in general women do not move beyond the second stage. "Women really never have had the four stages of life since the *Mohindara* — the forest universities. Especially after the Mogul invasions they haven't had them."<sup>2</sup> Hence a woman's sense of self, of power, is usually developed within the family pattern. It must be realized there or not at all. That women in India achieve security, power, and position is obvious. They have been content to develop this position with the passing of time, experiencing it in old age, and to operate even then within the accepted framework of family relationships. Furthermore, those women with leisure time have enriched their lives with reading, music, art, and other cultural activities. In recent years the

nationalistic movement was strongly and actively supported by women, and independent India has many women in politics. Most important, despite the actual subjugation of women, they themselves rarely feel that their status is inferior. They are proud to be women, to be wives, to be mothers. Any new aspects of their role must come second to their primary function.

It may be pertinent to women's concept of self to mention the point of view of *F* and *Z* toward names. *F* (single, twenty-four, planning to get married), particularly dislikes being called "Miss ——" instead of by her first name, for it seems to her a reminder that she is an "old maid" and that she is already too old to get married. She cannot imagine herself as perhaps remaining single, and, in fact, has thought a great deal as to how she is going to bring up her children. *Z* (single, forty-five), has only recently begun to call herself "Miss *Z*.——," using her own first name, her custom having been to use her father's first name. She says she now thinks of herself as *Z*, but in India may go back to her father's name. (During the recent elections in India, despite many instructions to women to use their own names, many thousands had to be struck off the registers for using their fathers' or husbands' names.)

*Z*, who is certain she will not get married, says that an "Indian woman's ideal of self is that she must get married. It is her primary role. Her security is in her family solidarity. In education women get a growing awareness of their own ability, but still there is an emotional attachment to the family. Her money may be her own, even, but if the family says 'don't spend it,' she won't." (*Z* ascribes her own unmarried state to exceptional circumstances and to her choice of a higher education.)

*G* (single, the one who has lived away from India for many years), said that she is very Western in that she does see her own security within herself. "Most women see it only in their parents, in their husbands. Parents make for most of the trouble in India. Parents love the children to excess. And there is the problem of who is going to support the parents in old age. In India it is the duty of the sons to support the parents; otherwise they are condemned by society. Of course I would like to do something for my parents. I don't know why, but I think it is more because of love than duty, for as a daughter there is no traditional 'duty'. I don't believe in obedience, as an Indian woman should. I do

believe in compromise and adjustment. Submissiveness I hate, though I'm very submissive in my own nature — even though I'm independent. I am completely independent of my parents. I think greatly of the dignity of women, as does my mother. Mother is dominant, but democratic, saying that when a girl is big enough she should go her own way. Mother is even in favour of love marriages, though father is much opposed to them." In replying to a question regarding her fears, *G* said, "Nobody has put fears into me, but I am afraid of wild animals, especially in the dark. I am very afraid of dogs, and my mother never liked them either. I have always been afraid of all animals because of my mother's attitude toward them. I am also afraid to sleep alone. That is silly, because I'm a very independent person, but I am afraid."

*X* (Christian, married — by a "love marriage" — to a Hindu), spoke thus of security: "Indian women do have a sense of security. Their emotional and financial security is assured. They do not say one word — but go as they are pushed. We cannot have security in the individual, for she isn't important. The Indian girl's security is in her culture. It assures her of financial security; her husband will be chosen, she will live in her son's house and has no fear of old age. Her only real insecurity has to do with the possibility that her husband will die before her. Then she is a widow, dependent on the family group. The mother-in-law may be cruel. If she is a good mother-in-law she will be all right. She will submerge her personality for her children. She never remarries, but she may get qualifications and work."

*E* (single, a dancer) said that woman's function today is different from what it used to be. "A woman must now do more than look after her children; it is her duty to do something in the community, her duty to display her talents if she has them." *E* admitted she didn't know how she grew up to have this concept of duty, and also admitted that in her case it was difficult to live according to this concept. "My talent, for instance, is dancing. I want to use this talent and believe in using it. But my parents are against it, for a dancer is on a public stage, all bedecked, to be looked at. So that an Indian woman really doesn't achieve her full personality. She is always under control. We are told all the time, 'Control yourself, don't be a tomboy'. There is virtue in *not* doing things. And a girl can't do much about it, because she is secure only if she lives according to society's ideas."

B (married, two children, the deviant) said that women do not think of themselves as selves, but through identification try to become like their mothers — “rarely like the mother-in-law, as she is like an ogre”. They learn, through observation, the social mores which contribute to their attitudes. “Women are taught to edge away from men so as to not touch them, for instance. The man doesn’t move aside, the woman does. In a bus, for instance, she has a respectful distance all around her—quite unlike the situation in America! Similarly, she does not take the arm of her husband, even in crossing the street. She follows her husband through doors and down the street. This shows her position. An Indian man is the ‘lord’, the ‘god’. Our women are moulded like wax. For one thing they are treated like milch cows. When girls are about ready for marriage, it is like being auctioned like a heifer. Women come and look them over to see if they will make fit wives. This Indian method of exhibiting a girl does lower her concept of herself as a person. She is being weighed against money, property, her accomplishments, her fair skin — but not against her character, her personality. This concept of self becomes a negative one. She is the efficient server of the family, not a thinking individual. Her unquestioned future is marriage, so that her security lies not so much in the love of her husband as in his regard for her in her role as efficient housewife and mother. He won’t seek another wife, but she is not his companion mentally. She’s just not concerned. The result of all this is that an Indian woman doesn’t often want for herself. She thinks only of the family.”

C (married — by parental choice — to a devoted husband, one child) described the function of woman as three-fold — “to be an ideal daughter, an ideal wife, an ideal mother. These three concepts can’t be separated. To *obey* the father, to *worship* the husband, and to *take care of* the children — they all go together. A friend and I have discussed the fact of ‘worship and obey’ the husband. We find it changing only in highly intellectual classes not changing at all for others. In developing the full personality, women are still submissive. There is too much compromise. Girls get it in their training from childhood. The home is the ideal for the child. She sees the mother as inferior to the father, the father as superior. The wife should always compromise, partly because she is economically dependent on her husband. The majority are dependent in the middle and upper classes. In the lower

classes women are economically independent—they can go out and do as they please, because they have to earn money in the fields anyway. But they are also submissive, and rarely think of leaving the home. People in India are very indifferent to others.

“A girl learns that she must be a good housewife, a good follower of her husband, a good manager of the home. This is negation, but it is not withdrawal. It is good, and it is done with pride. Women are proud of their position as women. Many have more than two or three children, but even then they want to do everything. This is a limited view of the self. Now there is a transition period. Many girls are not fully interested in the home, as the older Indian women were, or in the career, as American women are. It is a time of conflict, and many women don't know what to do. Our society is not yet ready to accept careers for women. An Indian woman's security is entirely in her home and her husband, not in herself. For instance, few Indian women are interested in political rights. They don't think about rights. They don't think that way, although they did work for independence.

“It was easier to be a girl in the old days than now. Once one had only to be a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother. Today men expect women to have some education, to be business-like, to go shopping, and so on. And in the small family there is only one woman, who has all the work and then gets too tired. A woman can't be all that she should to her husband. In my province men were pining for intellectual companionship as well as physical, so there was a period when some got two wives, one for intellectual and one for physical companionship. They even used those terms. This isn't done now, but men want all these things in women, and women have too big a job.”

C spoke repeatedly about wanting her husband's satisfaction more than anything else. “Emancipation from the family is not common in India. We say ‘his satisfaction is hers, her success is his’.” C has been agonized over leaving her child to come to the United States—more or less sure she should not have left her, but doing so in the desire to comply with her husband's wish. Nothing in her cultural background prepared her for a choice between husband and child—hence she fell back upon simple obedience. “Our personal happiness is in children, in husband, sacrificing the self, willingly finding it in the husband. I have so much love for my husband—and this is mutual—that I have a feeling of security

in him and his kindness, generosity, and wisdom. There is no question of equal rights, though I agree with a friend that in the lower classes women are treated very badly and there probably should be laws for their protection." (C married when sixteen, then went to college at her husband's request, and has obtained her M.A. in psychology in this country wholly because her husband wished her to do so.)

We have seen in the above material, and indeed in the entire study, that the whole purpose of the training and education of Hindu girls is preparation for marriage. But marriage is not the end in itself, but the means—and the only means—by which the family is perpetuated. It is the family that is important, that must be protected, that must be kept alive. The wife and mother is in one sense the centre of that family, but she is the "efficient server" as well. She is both the queen and the slave, in either aspect being indispensable. She exists because of the family—and for the family. Therefore it is not surprising that the Hindu woman feels a strong identification of self with the family. It would be almost inconceivable for her to think of herself as separate from her family—and that apparently happens only in cases of much Western influence.

As such an integral part of the family, the Hindu woman apparently rarely wants for herself. She does not resent her economic dependence, nor does she become grasping in that dependence. This rests largely upon her relationship to her husband, who is more than a biological mate. He is her *gurudev* (god and teacher) as well, and there is no connotation of ruthless power in the title. It is more that he has the responsibility of authority to care for his dependants. It is the wife's role to sacrifice herself for the family—according to her role prescriptions—just as the husband sacrifices himself according to his. This sacrifice is not resented. It is the social expectation, and one is "virtuous" in its performance.

It would be erroneous to assume that the elements of sacrifice, submission, and resignation, so pronounced in the Hindu feminine personality, result in a lack of self-respect. The Hindu woman has a very definite self-respect, but it stems from her identification of self with family. She is helpless without the family, but so is it helpless without her. Her self-respect is based on interdependence and a faithful performance of her functional duty. It is interesting, nevertheless, to note the frequency of the words "stigma",

"self-conscious", "compromise", and "duty" in the informants' conversations.

### Deeper Aspects of Self

The above conclusion—that Indian women are members of a group rather than individuals—does not imply that Indian women do not enjoy leisure activities that are designed to further their own enjoyment of life, nor that they do not have an inner life of their own. Poverty and hard work prevent much of this, but the Indian woman who has the time does pursue her own interests. In fact, she is more likely to have interests of her own, within the home, than any for the sake of society. Thus some Hindu women do become "individuals" in some ways, with unique gifts and abilities, though generally within certain socially prescribed limits. We see some clues to these individual personalities, as well as repetitions of the aspects of self identified with family, in the use of some of Allport's psychological interview questions.<sup>1</sup>

C gave the following information. Her chief hobbies and cultural interests are music and literature. Her ambition is to do something in the field of child development that will help the whole field of education in India. She has been profoundly influenced by her mother and her husband, but not by teachers. Her day-dreams are all related to her husband. He becomes a great hero, a famous person. Her fears are wholly related to separation from husband or child. She has suffered no severe humiliation, has had no neurotic difficulties, has experienced no important religious experience, and her only real aversion is "dictatorship". She expressed her philosophy of life as "I will try to satisfy everybody in the home, even suffering some sacrifice to myself. My husband deserves everything—all love and consideration. I would like to contribute to all members of the family, but I will do it more willingly if it is satisfactory to my husband also. I will do everything to increase his success and his position in life." Then she described her concept of self. "I accept myself as I am. I do have self-respect, but I am not satisfied with myself. I can improve myself if I accept myself as I am first, for if I have doubt of myself I will have an inferiority complex."

<sup>1</sup> G. Allport, *Personality, a Psychological Interpretation* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1937), p. 510

Y (Moslem, twenty-four, unmarried) said that girls are not consciously trained for womanhood, with many precepts, punishments, or rewards. "It is partly because they do have the desire for approval that they become good women, but mainly they see the value in womanhood and are not just looking for social acceptance. Girls never want to be boys, women never want to be men. Femininity is good. Great women in stories and legends are used as models, but I never noticed I was being trained. We just learn in the atmosphere. I was never told 'Don't stay away from home after seven,' but I just knew the family pattern and came home by that time. I never wanted any spending money for myself—or *anything*. My mother used to say that she wished I would ask even one time for something. But I never asked. I never felt the need. I don't ever want anything special for myself. I want *all* people to have good things. I don't myself want anything others don't have. It is not a question of inhibition. We don't have this word. My friends here don't understand that. They don't believe, for instance, that I have not kissed. I have had many opportunities—but I did not want to do it. Nothing was inhibited. Most women and most children in India are very submissive, of course. That is true, and it is the result of our education and our psychology. I don't know whether to say women are happy or not. I just don't know. They will say they are, but I don't know if they really are. They *are* satisfied, content—and some are truly happy. But most just don't know anything else."

Y, in reply to the Allport questions, said, "My hobbies are to collect pictures and to read stories of great men. As to cultural interests I like to go and see places—villages, museums, movies (just psychological movies or tragedies—there I see the struggle or where there is social uplift), paintings, and so forth. I like to hear music, but I can't sing. I like dancing and sports and am quite good in them. Now my greatest interest is psychology. I am fond of religion, but as a way of life, to help others or to better myself. I am not orthodoxly religious. (She reads the *Koran* or some other scripture almost daily). My ambition is to try to do something to improve humanity. Since I come from what is now Pakistan, I should start there. The greatest personal influences in my life come from my mother, my sister, who is my ideal, a girl friend, a college teacher, and several others. I am much influenced by people. My daydreams generally find me in a position where I am doing

things I want. At times I am rather helpless and someone is helping me, but usually I am working in social uplift. My fears are very silly. I am very afraid of snakes, and I don't know why. I am also afraid of drunken men. As to worries, I am constantly worried that I will do something to hurt my mother, though I know she would not care. I should not do anything against the family tradition. I should not underrate my own country, either. I really represent Pakistani women here. These things I am afraid of, but I have no personal worries. It is true I have had some very bad humiliations. I am sensitive to a fault. Disappointments are all right—they are just a challenge to me. But humiliations I take personally, and I just can't stand any kind of injustice. In school I had several real humiliations. Once when I was small, as I was very good at reciting, I was chosen to represent my class in an inter-school competition. Mother made me a special dress—it was green and I still remember it. One day before the recitation the teacher said, 'Your father is dead and so it won't matter if you don't recite,' and she chose a girl whose father was a big shot. I howled and howled. My mother was sympathetic, and my sister was so angry she changed my school. But I have never recited again. It is the same with singing. When I was little I used to sing very well, but once when I was five I was so teased by some older girls about a song I sang that now I don't sing.

"As to aversions, I am not sure you would call these 'aversions' but I hate insincere people. And somehow I have an intuition on sincerity. Neither can I stand backbiting, though I don't mind criticism given outright. I am also opposed to untidiness. I don't mind a place being untidy and yet I must tidy it. If it is neurotic to brood, that applies to me. I brood for hours and hours. I sulk—I don't know why—and I am stubborn about it. I won't go and shout about things. I will just be very nice to that person who did something I didn't like—and then sulk about it. I have had no sex experiences. Absolutely none. My philosophy of life is a belief in simple living, with high ideals and the opportunity to work hard for them."

*F* (the nurse, single, twenty-four) said, "It is a common proverb that 'Women's wits are only in their feet'. Women always give in, as they are considered inferior. I don't know why Indian men don't accord brains to Indian women; they do to Western women. But the men are taught that women are subservient, and the women

just follow along." She went on to discuss the woman's "self". "In an Indian woman's self-fulfilment there is no want, no 'self'. It is through her preparation as a mother. That is so important that even sex has an entirely different concept from that in the United States. In America the girls do things lightly, with no psychological effects or trauma. But in India it is very important, very deep. Premarital sex relations would be impossible, would be revolting.

"Just the same, there is little unhappiness among Indian women, because the fundamental needs of human beings are taken care of. They have food, shelter, affection, social security, social acceptance, and work—unlike women in the United States. Therefore they have no initiative for other things. In an Indian woman's concept of self, when she is a child she sees herself as her mother sees her. After growing up, 40 per cent see themselves as their husbands see them, 60 per cent as their mothers-in-law see them. They are completely unaware of 'self'. A woman's security is in her parental home. Long after marriage it is in her husband, but up to then it is in her home, as she is an alien in her husband's family. Married life saps her of so much that all her replenishing comes from home."

*F* was much interested in the Allport questions, having done a great deal of thinking during the past year about herself. Having been in the United States for over three years, away from her family, she has found it necessary to think about herself, "which no Indian woman with her family would do". She prefaced her remarks with, "I am very different from most Indian women. All my friends say I am an individual. . . . My hobbies are reading, embroidering, knitting, leather tooling, occasionally painting. I like to listen to music, go to plays, dance, listen to lectures, and take part in discussion groups. I am too ambitious for an Indian girl. Once I had many ambitions, but right now my main one is to keep life from getting dull, to keep going forward, with ever-widening horizons. I want to be a successful human being. I really have too many interests. When I came here I wanted to be useful, especially to India. That's why I became a nurse. Now that ambition has widened and has lost its force. Yes, people have influenced me. Especially my father, who never hurt anybody, even when insulted. He was a man of unlimited gentleness and kindness. He would never say 'no', and would go out of his way to do things

with limitless generosity. I have had little contact with my mother. She was always ill. It is true she was aware of my needs, but that was my only contact with her. She did influence me, actually, on the negative side. She is a manic depressive, slowly deteriorating and I have sat up many nights with her. Our tasks at home were divided, and it was my job to look after mother. I never had more than six and a half hours of a sleep a night. I gave five years of my life in trying to fill the needs of my younger sisters—the needs I was aware my mother could not fill. Because of mother's illness I searched the family situation to find out why it was so unhappy. What could mother have done? I learned to think and became acutely aware of my needs. Therefore I gave as much as I could to my younger sisters. It was good for them, but I paid a big price. It was worth it, because we got out of the vicious circle; things weren't repeated day after day. But all this experience is responsible for my pessimistic attitude toward life, despite my exterior. (Outwardly *F* is an extrovert—laughing, jolly. She says this is a recent development, deliberately achieved.) I have another sister, a paranoid schizoid, who is in an institution. I think she will never recover.

"Another who has influenced me is a teacher. She was not conscious of this influence, but unconsciously she gave me my interest in literature and the English language. I am a nurse because she was the only one in school with whom I had good interpersonal relations. I gave her more than I received. She was a substitute mother figure, though she gave me no affection. But she always had a belief in me, and could predict what I was going to do. Other influences have been a counsellor, a doctor in St. Louis, and an American woman married to a Moslem in Detroit. But most of my real influences have come through books. Ninety per cent of my development is from books, but I have evaluated what I've read.

"I don't have too many daydreams. I am imaginative, but I am also very practical. I don't see myself as a great heroine or successful figure. I do worry a lot, but that is different from fear. I have no fears in this world. But I worry about how our home can be straightened out, about the youngsters, about the youngest working out her life. I have no positive relationship toward my mother, but I hope nothing happens to her while I'm here. After all, I'm 'me' because of her. To me home life is very important—perhaps because we had such a poor one.

"I have had no disappointments of any consequence. In fact, I have always got what I really wanted, and I have a stupid, pointless, baseless belief that I'll always get what I want. College was thrown into my lap, and I had always wanted to be a nurse. I was admitted to Teachers' College after deciding only four weeks previously to try. And I got into International House on half hour's notice. Now I have been given a Rockefeller scholarship and have been offered a good position in India. No, I have had no real disappointments. But I have had one major humiliation—my first experience in falling in love. It has taken me years to get over it, and I am not over it yet. I was humiliated because my concept of self was so damaged—I was told I wasn't worthy. I learned a great deal through the situation, but it has been very painful.

"The only marked aversion I have is for any kind of brutal force—physical or mental. As for a philosophy of life—I believe that nothing is going to last forever, good or bad. This does much to reduce my anxieties. There is some good in every situation and in every human being. I protect myself from the negative, and don't 'want' any more. I expect good—and get it—though sometimes there is a long wait. Life is painful, and I am not looking for everlasting happiness. I have learned a lot about accepting life as it is. I'm not going to sit around and mope—it does no good. Indian women do mope; they don't get rid of their feelings. I don't do so violently, but I do express my opinions—though I am severely criticized by my friends for doing so. When an Indian woman comes to America she has to think about herself, as she is not surrounded by her family. If her family is here she will not think. She is afraid to, and does not know how. But if she is alone she simply must. I have to be an 'I', but in India you can't survive as an 'I'. I am gregarious—and would be a failure as a career woman. I am very much aware of myself. I am basically very sad, very full of anxieties—I don't know why, as I've had so many positive things in my life as well as the negative. It has won me many friends. Each evening I evaluate my self and my day, thinking over what has made my day happy—or sad—or successful."

A (single, engaged; an excellent student, with background in Tagore's school), in answering the Allport questions, said, "My hobbies are photography, reading, walking, and seeing dancing and painting. The only career I want is that of housewife, and I plan to do all my own housework. I have been greatly influenced

by people. By my mother first of all, then to a very great extent by Tagore, and more recently by Nehru—but not by Gandhi. Yes, I have daydreams. I imagine becoming economically very successful, even as a housewife, but not by myself. I imagine a career and my home—even to the colour schemes and to the books I shall have. I dream of being successful with some of the things I have learned in this country, and how I can use them in India—like discussion groups, poetry-reading groups, and so on. My fears are that we might be living in an unknown system of government that we don't understand or believe. It is half good, half bad, and it endangers family life. If I knew more I would go in for politics. We now have a very heartless regime; it doesn't satisfy one's ideas of realness or goodness. It has no values—but just economic standards.

“I have had no especial humiliations or disappointments. I am very lucky. One cousin committed suicide, and that was a shock to the whole family. My greatest aversion is for the distorted sex life in the United States and India. It is in everyday life—in literature, dress, etc. I also have an aversion for people who are very bright, very successful, very great. In their personal lives they are so corrupt, so empty, so devoid of any values. Father thinks a man can be a great artist without being a good man, but I don't think he can. I think I am neurotic in my shyness. I have to fight it all the time. As for any important religious experience, I had never known anything about atheism and learned of it at sixteen. I was very bewildered and confused. In my philosophy of life I have no place for theology. I see life as vague and prefer to keep it that way, with no special Him or *mantram*—but with more of a feeling. I don't even pray to God, but He would know what I was feeling. I don't necessarily want to go to the temple. These moments of revelation come anywhere—on a streetcar even. Peace, humanity, goodness—they are almost too sacred to be talked about. Mother never taught me to say prayers at night. Being good is enough. God is not one from whom one asks favours.”

A spoke of the Indian woman's concept of self. “It is first in connection with her mother and father, then with her husband and finally with her son. The husband is really ultimately the god of all her life, even though there might be no romantic relationship. Her chance for heaven is through her husband. Her son matters much until he is married. An Indian man's security is within himself and with his son. A man is happiest when his girls

are married off and his son has a job. But an Indian woman is happiest when the girls are married off and the son has a wife. It is the counterpart of American parents' "being pleased when their children are doing well in the university.

"There is some rebellion among women, but there is no tendency to introspection. It is mostly a question of resignation—which is the basis of all a woman's future. This resignation conditions a woman to accept the man given her. This resignation is very dependent on a lack of education. If a woman is uneducated, what has she to look forward to? It is a part of the whole fatalistic aspect of the religion. Always the gods are there, determining things for you. So that people don't feel it as fate. Hindus have the reincarnation theory, of course. But women are not philosophical. Women think in terms of the present and the gods they know. Boys and girls today are philosophical. The old pattern is to accept the present lot with patience and resignation. But it is changing. Girls go away to a political rally, for instance, coming home to get spanked for going. But they don't tell their parents about what goes on, especially if they belong to the Communist Party. It is an avoidance of the authority at home."

There has been no analysis of Hinduism in this study, but it is useful to point out the relationship of the resignation and submission of women, so often mentioned by the informants, to the similar resignation and submission of the lower caste groups to their functional position in society, with virtually no rebellion to this position. It is a difficult attitude for Westerners to understand—this apparent acceptance of a low position, with little will to fight for a different status or to escape into a different status. It must be understood as part of a philosophy that accepts great differentiation in human life at any one moment, that thinks of each human being as living through many lives, many functions. One's *karma* is one's fate in the sense that it is self-built. To accept this *karma* without chafing against it is to live a virtuous life; to try to escape it is to commit a sin—and to ensure a worse future existence. It is necessary, also, to remember the stark realism shown in many of the statements, such as "What is the use of rebelling? There is no place to go." There can be no resolution of the problem, considering the social context of the necessity of family and community acceptance and considering the practical aspects of economic dependence.

A commented on this point. "Village outcaste people have no chance to escape. Where would they go, and how would they get there? They accept their position. Actually, they don't want to escape, for then they would lose their little security. It is the same with women. A deviant would meet opposition from all others, especially from women of the older generation. There can be common cause between a wife and her sister-in-law—this is very frequent. But a husband will always stand with his mother." C spoke, too, of the concept of *karma*, adding a psychological explanation for passive acceptance of position. "Outcastes don't try to escape their *karma*. Their present birth depends on their previous birth. The important thing is that there should be no inferiority complexes. Every man has a reason for what he is. He is not to blame. This is bad, I think, for it will never raise a man. He takes this explanation not in material terms but in religious terms. But it means that there is no agony over what you are. This gives a tremendous self-satisfaction. Even in poverty there is no guilt feeling. They are poor because of their own deeds, not because of any system, class, or oppression."

It must not be assumed that the position of women is ideologically meant to be inferior to that of men, for that is certainly not the case, as we have seen. It does seem to mean, however, that in the corruptions, of the ideal, women have in fact been subjected to a lowered position, and that most of them have been submissive, their attitude toward position being related to their *karma*. This very fact has made necessary the dynamics of a strong woman's movement, with men and women leaders pleading for a realization of the Vedic ideal. Though the lofty ideal has resulted in a neglect of the physical woman, it has also made possible both real and potential feminine power.

### General Concept of the Feminine Self

One concludes from this study that Hindu women are submissive and that they do not fulfil their potentialities or fully develop their individual personalities, but one also concludes that they are relatively secure psychologically. An evaluation of the "goods" over the "bads" seems fruitless, and any evaluation would be a cultural judgment in itself. But it is helpful to sum up the factors in each aspect of the Hindu woman's psyche.

The submissiveness and lack of full personal development are closely related to the family and social system, in which the woman is more a member of a group than an individual. (1) Initiative is not encouraged, and there is little place for it in the system. (2) The emphasis is on duty, virtue consisting of performing this socially prescribed duty. (3) There is little social approval or encouragement of ambition, of new ventures, of deviant behaviour. (4) There is great social approval of conformity, obedience, self-control, and harmony. (5) Infants are trained in social relationships rather than in autonomy over their bodies. At no time and in no way does there seem to be an "I am master of my self" attitude fostered. The emphasis on self-control is in consideration of social laws, in consideration of the group. (6) Girls, in growing up, especially in their experiences at the onset of menstruation, are well conditioned to a passive acceptance of their lot, and they rarely question it. (7) Girls definitely learn that they are in an inferior position to that of men. This is not to say that femininity is not important, nor that girls wish they were boys. (8) The general result is a compliant personality, and no other general type of personality could normally develop under such social conditions.

The Hindu woman's great strength lies in her psychological security, which is related, of course, to her compliant nature. The chief factors in this security and contentment seem to stem from the non-competitive society, with a philosophy of the diversity and relativity of function, and from the closeness of family ties. There is a maximum of identification with the social group, and a minimum of tension between parents and children. (1) Girls have a definite place in a structured family group and in a structured society. They are considered important and necessary to the social system. Significantly, they understand their importance and their future role. The role is clearly defined to them and to society. (2) Their relationship to members of the family is prescribed, and they do not lose this relationship in adolescence, nor do they lose all of it in marriage. (3) As a factor in this relationship, girls receive the protection of their family and of society. It is the duty of all to protect them. (4) As another factor in the relationship, girls do not make decisions or choices, and individual initiative is not developed. Girls have responsibility only in the sense that it is their responsibility to live according to society's prescribed rules. (5) As a special point regarding decisions, they do not have the

burden or tension of choosing a husband. The responsibility belongs to the family. (6) Marriage is taken for granted. It is an absolute expectation, and girls never wonder whether they will get married or not, whether they will "find a man" or not. (7) Children do not have a separate set of rules or prohibitions from those of the adults. There are some things, connected with life processes, for which they must wait, but otherwise, they live according to the same rules as adults. Thus they identify themselves closely with their parents. (8) Children share the adult work world, their contributions helping the entire family group. (9) Throughout their whole lives, children enjoy a freedom from individual blame—provided they are obedient and dutiful. Babies are not scolded for being clumsy, dirty, or naughty—as they are considered too young to understand. An adolescent girl is considered too innocent to undertake her own protection. Any unhappiness in marriage—again, provided the wife is virtuous—is charged to the family, which arranged the marriage. Even one's mishaps in life are a result of one's *karma*, of one's previous existence. A woman, if faithful and dutiful, regardless of difficulties or tragedies, will retain the approval of society—an essential ingredient of her self-respect. (10) A woman's role is strictly prescribed. She does have many duties and many restrictions, but the authority for these prescriptions comes from society and not just from her parents. They are a part of the accepted Hindu philosophy. (11) Moreover, in ways unimportant socially, especially in childhood, a girl is allowed some freedom and ego-satisfaction. (12) Throughout her whole life, but again especially in childhood, she is surrounded by love and affection. (13) Her education (which includes training at home) does not seem an unnecessary burden, for it has functional meaning to her. It is preparation for marriage, the one and only future for which she is preparing. (14) She is satisfied with her role prescription and has little personal ambition. Virtue consists of adjusting to conditions, not of changing conditions or in moving to another social sphere. (15) Finally, and most important, she has the unique power of motherhood, so revered in India. Her feminine power is that of creation, and her sex alone can achieve it.

It is helpful to view the Hindu woman's concept of self in relation to its formation and development. The basic personality structure, according to social psychological theory, is formed by the culture

(itself based on socio-economic conditions) and in turn forms the culture. Parents tend to treat their children as they themselves were treated as children, especially in a stable society. Hindu society has been relatively stable until recently, so that the culture impinging on the child through the family has had little deviation from the traditional beliefs and attitudes.

As illustration of the above point, let us look at three short quotations from a modern philosophy written by a Hindu businessman of South India, A. Thangal Kunju Musaliar. They deal with three of the most important concepts we have seen in this study: parental authority, propriety, and mutuality, all of which have come down from the time of the Vedas with no basic change.

No true parent can ever abdicate his proper function as the guide and moral censor of youth. . . . Freedom does not mean pampering, but rather an unobtrusive supervision that alters wrong attitudes, and saves the child from the risks of bad company and evil living, all the while laying foundations of a happy and harmonious development.<sup>2</sup> Propriety gives charm and grace to our actions, adorns knowledge, wins friends, and smoothes the way to all the advantages of a comfortable, decorous, and well-satisfied life.<sup>3</sup> Mutuality is the basis of existence, and interdependence the law of life.<sup>4</sup>

A girl is born into this cultural role expectation. Parental authority, which is based on social authority, seems to result in a kind of absolutism which breeds satisfaction, not revolt. The lack of criticism of the family pattern is marked in the informants' material, and there is relatively little desire for change. This is undoubtedly rooted in the fact that satisfaction with the group membership remains stable. The women informants, reflecting their own and the general attitude of Hindu women they know, like the Hindu family as it is, support family absolutism on the whole, and seem not to have moved much into what Jean Piaget calls the last stage in acquiring roles—reciprocity between oneself and others through which one comes to recognize different perspectives and to be able to make one's own moral judgments.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> A. T. K. Musaliar, *Man and the World* (Santa Fe, San Vicente Foundation, 1949), p. 67

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107

<sup>5</sup> Jean Piaget, "Social Factors in Moral Development," in T. Newcomb and E. L. Hartley, ed., *Readings in Social Psychology* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1947)p. 383

Hindu girl, submissive to the dictates of her parents, accepts them without question because she accepts her family without question, and she does not search for her own values. She moves from the first stage, autism, quite rapidly into absolutism and then more or less stays there, accepting the finality of authority. That this is acceptable instead of objectionable is due to the compliant basic personality, which finds pleasure and stability in such a relationship. The Hindu woman, like the "moving toward" person in Karen Horney's classification, finds real satisfaction in the group. She likes and needs affection and approval, she likes to be needed, she likes to be important to others. She does not find it irksome to be in a subordinate position, but enjoys doing things for others.

We see, thus, genuine role satisfaction, though the role has been socially prescribed. It was a marked characteristic of the informants' concept of self and of womanhood to accept womanhood, without a rejection of its demands. Considering the absence of competition and considering the idealistic reverence of womanhood in India, this means that women approve a system in which there is no prodding for them to live according to male standards and in which there is no undervaluation of their own role.

Relative to her role acceptance is the fact that the role is very clearly defined in Hindu India. There is great consistency in the response of others to her role, and society exhibits a complete shift in response when the girl becomes a woman. Furthermore, the role permits the individual to realize the dominant goals of her group and allows much opportunity for emotionally intimate contact and for practice in the future role in play and real life. The above points, according to Leonard Cottrell, show a great amount of adjustment to the age-sex role.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, have we found this feminine self to be? Certainly it is a self that has identified with others; in the married woman it has identified with the husband. The woman is largely developed by the husband, and their personalities mesh and become, harmonious. The woman adjusts herself to the life of her husband helping him in all ways that she can. She does not have her own personal ambitions and does not think of her own rights. This does not mean she does not possess creativity or originality, but that if she has talents they will not be used in a competitive way.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Cottrell, "The Adjustment of the Individual to His Age and Sex Roles," in Newcomb and Hartley, *Readings in Social Psychology*, pp. 371-2

She finds more happiness in the achievements of her husband than in any of her own. This results in a great deal of helplessness in matters outside the home, though in her own domain the Hindu woman is assured and confident. She is extraordinarily sensitive to human relations and shows a great degree of tolerance for all kinds of people and all points of view.

It is interesting to note the similarity between the Hindu feminine woman and what Helene Deutsch has called the "feminine passive" woman, a rare type in our Western culture. She describes traits of this type of femininity as narcissism (self-loving, wanting to be loved), passivity (activity directed inward), and intensification of masochism. From her clinical experience she has found this type to have a positive relationship with her mother, to be overwhelmingly monogamous, to be prone to feelings of solitude, nostalgia, and brooding, and to have a great capacity for real love (in contrast to "being in love"). These points seem to fit Hindu women as a general norm. It is further pertinent that Dr. Deutsch attributes many of the neuroses of Western women to the effects of competition. She found that the above type, rare in Western society, had not tried to compete. Unmindful of Hindu society, she suggests that a new form of society, less competitive, might be desirable.<sup>7</sup> It would certainly seem that India, a very old society, has much to demonstrate on this point.

We conclude this study of Hindu womanhood to show how the concepts of femininity fit into the general social concepts. It is apparent that the particular quality of womanhood in Hindu India is well integrated with general Hindu social theory and practice. The *varna-dharma* philosophy is based on diversity and relativity, not on equality. It imposes very strict social expectations on each person, each being expected to perform his *dharma* (duty) according to his *varna* (caste, function). But Hindu society, though fairly rigid in its social expectations, exerts a minimum of pressure upon the individual, and the Hindu lives his life with little anxiety or guilt. Within the system of interdependent duties he is expected to make his own contribution, but he in turn receives basic needs and security. Significantly, his *dharma*—or role prescription—is within his ability, and hence its difficulty cannot add to personal tension. Personal choice is not allowed in socially important areas, but outside of those areas there is a fair amount of freedom.

<sup>7</sup> Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women*, Vol. I, pp. 190, 214-7, 354-7

One's personal happiness, success, and security are much more a part of society than of one's self. One is, in fact, more a member of a social group than a self.

We have tried to show in this study something of the quality of Hindu womanhood and how the feminine role is interiorized by girls as they grow up. Much is a result of conscious training in the home ; much is a result of unconscious acceptance of social customs and values that are widely accepted and higher than parental dictates or the individual's own desires. There is little doubt that Hindu women conceive of themselves as members of the family group. They are essential to the group, and the group is essential to them. Nor is there doubt that the impact of individualism—as a corollary of industrialism, modern education, and new forms of government—will have fundamental effects on the group-mindedness of Hindu women. But we should be in grave error if we assumed that such individualism as may come will necessarily and inevitably take the form it has in the West. As we have seen in this study, the traditions of Hindu India are long and deep. No culture breaks entirely with its past. Interdependence and harmony are values that are likely to persist and to condition the development of the individuality of Hindu women and the social structure of India itself. Hindu women, as in all their history, are responding to society's need of them—and are filling their expanding roles for that reason and not in a spirit of competitive challenge. It is still essential to them to be primarily wives and mothers, giving their services with selfless devotion.



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# SHE WHO RIDES A PEACOCK

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